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対魔導学園35試験小隊

AntiMagic Academy "The 35th Test Platoon"

1.英雄召喚

ファンタジア文庫

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1.Einherjar wakes

Prologue

Spring. After becoming a second year student in AntiMagic Academy, Kusanagi Takeru was freezing on the first day of school.

The students thought they were just going to be lectured in the classrooms, instead, they were given an assault rifle each, heard an announcement, "From today onwards, I'd like you all to kill each other for a bit." and have ended up pretending to kill each other with paint bullets.

Their first lesson has turned into a deathmatch between fellow classmates.

It had a twenty versus twenty format. At the beginning there were forty of them.

Although the pretend battle seemed like it would take a while, it ended just 30 minutes later.

"............"

Kusanagi fell on his back facing the sky, had a cold muzzle pressed against his forehead and was feeling nothing but consternation.

Immediately after starting, instead of using a rifle Takeru held a plastic bayonet in his hand as he headed into the deathmatch, because of which classmates gave him odd looks.

However, a sword alone was enough for Takeru. His only sword was his only worth.

Unlike other students who weren't familiar with combat, he moved in the darkness to take down his opponents with a sword as he was trained to from an early age, he had confidence in himself.

『"I won't lose, I'll defeat you all and make the world realize swordsmanship is amazin'!"』

In fact, Takeru hadn't lost a single time until now.

『"I won't lose to anyone! Be it guns or magic, I'll cut through all of it!"』

He was confident right from the start

『"You're last... even if you're a woman I won't show ya mercy!!"』

With a bayonet in his hand, he was confident he wouldn't lose to anyone in here.

“...I, lost...?”

Looking upwards, he saw something unbelievable.

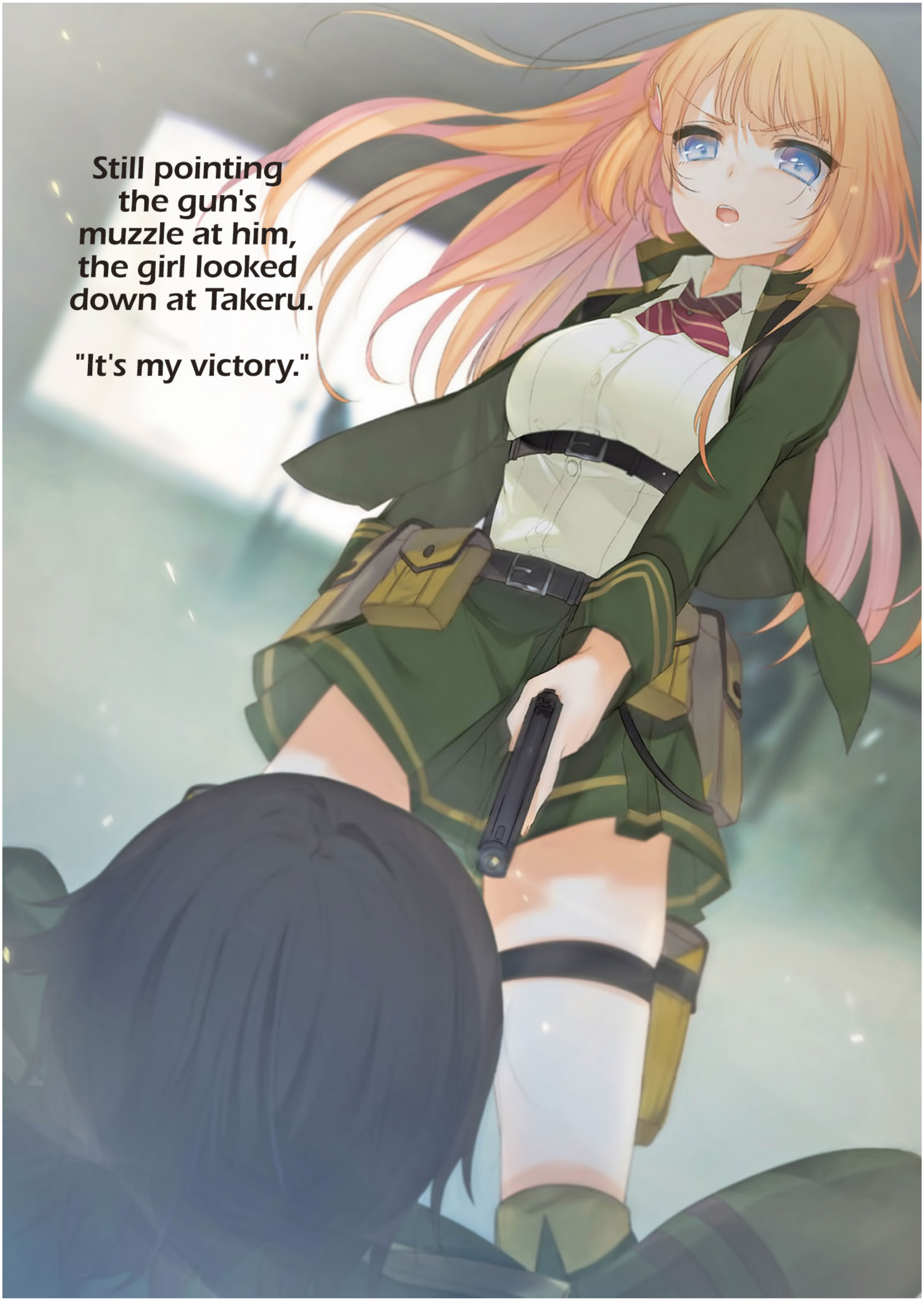
A scene that made him doubt his sight. Sunset-coloured hair shining brightly and cobalt colour pupils. Like an embodiment of mythical battle maidens, a beautiful girl looked down on Takeru.

The frustration he felt after losing, motivation he had after enrolling in the school, everything was blown away.

The perfect beauty and strength that can't be described by words was right there.

Still pointing the gun's muzzle at him, the girl looked down at Takeru.

"It's my victory."



Still pointing the gun's muzzle at him, the girl looked down at Takeru.

"It's my victory."

That instant, Takeru's dream and goal, "Becoming the Inquisition head and changing the world." has collapsed.

That was his middle school era.

It happened approximately 2 years ago.

It's been a few hundred years since the witches had been suppressed.

When the "Witch-Hunt War", a conflict between the witches and humanity had ended, the mankind's population went down to one-tenth of its original size.

Humans took 150 years to rebuild society, the world displayed a rapid development of science and technology and begun to show a glimpse of further economic growth due to spread of things like the internet and mobile phones.

The witches were under regulation and the fantastical creatures were nearly extinct. Only a few people were capable of generating magical power in their bodies.

Just like the title of the strongest had once changed from sword to magic, now it had changed from the magic to guns.

Chapter 1 - Problem Children, Assemble!

The Inquisitors training institution.

It's nicknamed "AntiMagic Academy".

The age of discrimination towards witches and sorcerers, as well as Magical Heritages has began in the earnest.

In order to crack down on threats related to 【Magic】, the country has established the Inquisition.

The ones who rebelled against it were humans possessing magical power, in other words - witches.

That unrest was later called "Witch-Hunt War", an abominable conflict which consumed the majority of the human race and left a deep scar in minds of people.

After the Witch-Hunt War ended, the Inquisition further increased regulation concerning witches and established laws for punishing them, they also founded an Inquisitor training institution called AntiMagic Academy.

Inquisition's power had a firm foundation established.

"...fired, you say?"

In AntiMagic Academy's chairman's office, a girl with sunset-coloured hair frowned dissatisfied.

"Indeed. To be precise, it's deprivation of qualifications, I guess? Since you can obtain them once again, it means you aren't fired. From today onwards, you're not a member of Inquisition, which means you have become a student of AntiMagic Academy."

AntiMagic Academy's and Inquisition's chairman, Ootori Sougetsu, said so with a faint smile. His appearance and gestures made it hard to judge whether he was a man or a woman, he had an unique and daunting seductiveness.

"As for why you were punished... you know already, right?"

"............"

The girl could tell what was it about and remained silent. Sougetsu raised a cup with tea from an old, luxurious desk and leaned on the back of his chair.

"Don't tell me you forgot about your recent blunder. If it turned out badly it could have become a grave problem for Inquisition. Think of yourself lucky that you got a chance to start over."

"............"

"You've abandoned your mission despite being a 'Dullahan', this is the punishment for that."

Sougetsu raised both his hands as he said that.

Each inquisitor has an appointed role.

Developing and maintaining various anti-magical weapons, were the "Reginn".

Serving as intelligence and infiltration agents, the "Banshee".

In charge of all medical treatment, responsible for treating injuries caused by magic are the "Seelie".

An assault forward possessing necessary equipment and tasked with Inquisition's self-defence are the "Spriggan".

And those who are allowed to perform investigations by themselves and arbitrarily enter combat were the "Dullahan".

There were diverse occupations since inquisitor's work was not limited to hunting witches. Their work was to resolve all issues in which magic is involved.

It's been 150 years since the Witch-Hunt War ended. Those who made use of magic, namely witches and sorcerers are few in number, which was the current status. Since the law forbid the witches remaining in this world to have offspring, other than mutations there were hardly any people born with magical power.

However, witches aside, there were other threats existing.

A substance harbouring magic inside, "Magical Heritage" was one of them.

There are various types of Magical Heritage in existence, swords, books, guns, vases, various pottery, paint brushes, leaves, tobacco, even cigarette butts. Magic dwelling in inorganic objects is not uncommon in modern times, but from time to time a tremendous weapon appears.

Confirmed to exist for a long time already, the lost-type Magical Heritages are mentioned in legends and folklore, they are also referred to as irregular substances having traces of magical power in them. Their value lied not only in being a weapon, they also had a high historical value. Since there were collectors gathering them, they were traded in the black market for high prices.

Other than that, they arrested people that did not have magical power yet belonged to cults and worshipped evil gods, dealing with supernatural disaster called Akashic Hazard and researching and protection of fantastic organisms. Their work spread very widely.

"Well, you don't have endure it until your graduation, don't let it weight on you so much. When it looks like you show signs of remorse, I think it would be all right for you to return to your original position. Learn from this experience and don't make a mistake like that aga——"!

"Excuse me, but I believe I did not take any improper actions in respect to matter from the other day."

The girl who had remained silent spoke as if to interrupt Sougetsu.

Normally, it would be outrageous for an inquisitor to speak in such manner towards the chairman. Sougetsu didn't mind it at all, he put his elbows on the desk and rested his chin on his hands, smiling.

"Ouka, I'll ask you one question. What do you think is an inquisitor's mission?"

Hearing Sougetsu's question, the girl named Ouka narrowed her eyes sharply.

"Protecting people from magical threats as well as extermination of witches and sorcerers."

"Extermination, huh. That's why comrades gave you a disgraceful nickname like 《Calamity》."

"............"

"Inquisitor's are fulfilling missions given by the Inquisition. That is to arrest witches and seizing Magical Heritage. Killing and destroying isn't one of the goals."

"...I have that in mind."

"The age where we killed and destroyed indiscriminately is already over. That way of acting caused false accusations to go rampant. Not all witches are villains, there are people who don't want to be one, we have to protect witches who are like that."

Ouka clenched her fist, hearing Sougetsu's pretty words unbearable anger has welled up in her.

"There's an old Japanese saying, for rice cakes go to the rice cake maker, isn't there. The Inquisition does not have a role for killing witches."

"...I understand what you want to say. I am aware of my own shortcomings. However, there was no other way than to kill the witch. Or maybe, should the child taken hostage be forsaken and the witch's arrest be prioritized instead?"

"You put a bullet in the witch's forehead despite the fact that there was a hostage, is that prioritizing human lives? Did you not consider a possibility of the hostage being killed?"

"For me, there is no such possibility."

Ouka said sharply, her pupils displayed complete self-confidence.

Sougetsu sighed.

"...anyway, from now on you're back to being a student. The procedures are already complete. From today onwards do your best studying."

Sougetsu opened his desk's drawer that contained documents.

"Obediently accept your punishment and come back later. With your skills you'll be back in no time."

"...I was in the middle of investigating the case of corpse collectors... I have clues on their trading partner, a little bit longer and I'll catch them. Please, let me continue for a litt——"

"I've said it before; that matter is within jurisdiction of the police, that's the agreement between Inquisition and the police's HQ."

"But we don't know when the living will become victims... the police's investigation is very lax."

"Since no traces of magic have been found Inquisition cannot intervene, you know that."

"......nhh."

"In the first place, you're no longer an inquisitor, you no longer have the right to interfere with the investigation."

Ouka's face clearly displayed her frustration.

"That always-discontent expression is wasting away your beauty, you know? Think of it as of great opportunity. I've thought for a long time that you should polish your social abilities. Even among 'Dullahan', your reputation is terrible. They say you're unfriendly and won't listen to anyone."

"...that can't be helped, that's how my personality is."

"See, that's exactly the problem. I think you joining the Inquisition at age of thirteen was premature... you joined before your humanity could develop in school."

Sougetsu sighed appalled, then threw the documents towards Ouka.

She gathered the documents scattered on the desk and still dissatisfied she looked through them.

"...this is?"

"Platoon roster. Although you were in middle school before, high school requires students to be part of a test platoon, you know that right."

"Haa, well."

"You've been incorporated into the 35th Test Platoon, it's nicknamed Small Fry Platoon."

"...........small fry?"

An easy to understand nickname, Ouka was stupefied.

Seeing her reaction Sougetsu laughed happily.

"A set of oddballs, it's my favourite platoon."

"Why do I have to be assigned to such unit?"

"Because, well, see?"

Sougetsu pointed his finger at Ouka and broadly grinned.

"Oddball."

"......!!"

"Yes yes, don't get so angry. You've always had such an explosive personality. It would be good if you fixed that as well, during your school life that is."

"I would like to change the assignment. Ideally, I want to be in a platoon all alone. That way I won't bother others and it's convenient for me as well."

"That would make no sense, would it. Also, it's already been decided and can no longer be changed. Members changing platoons is something prohibited by school rules."

Nishishi, Sougetsu laughed mischievously. Ouka couldn't help but feel regret.

"Well, don't be so pessimistic. Cooperation aside, their individual abilities are outstanding. More than anything, there's a candidate for the Relic Eater in there."

Relic Eater. That term made Ouka open her eyes wide in shock.

"N-no way... Are you saying that one of those guys is a candidate?"

"Yes. Since the last of the series... the Twilight Type left over after the Witch-Hunt War hasn't decided on its owner yet."

"That can't be! Why are you choosing from the students?! Only Dullahans should have been allowed to use Relic Eaters!"

"Even though you say that, you were a special case as well. You became a Dullahan at the age of thirteen, then soon after you were chosen as 《Vlad》's contractor."

"That's true but...! Why of all things, a Twilight Type Relic Eater."

"It's a shame, but even with your skill you were rejected by it. Other Dullahans tried as well, but it has rejected everyone. In that case, there's no choice but to choose from the students. Or maybe you want us to choose an amateur from among the civillians?"

Hearing Sougetsu's comment, Ouka lowered her head.

Relic Eaters were weapons only 'Dullahans" are allowed to use. They are completely different from modern firearms that used mithril and adamantium to produce anti-magic effects, having someone else other than Dullahan touch them would be breaking the law.

Relic Eaters are unquestionably Magical Heritage.

A product born from magical power, to humanity they are an abominable existence.

Relic Eater series' main form is that of a gun. Although it's a secret in what circumstances they were born as it's kept a secret and hasn't been revealed, they are all treated like a powerful Magical Heritage.

Fighting poison with poison. It's the forbidden weapon of those who wish to destroy magic.

In order to fill itself with dread and self-discipline, Inquisition named those Magical Heritages after historical tyrants, the devils.

"Of course, it wasn't our intention. We aren't choosing the candidates. Relic Eater is choosing its own contractor. You went through that yourself... so you know it, right?"

"...yes."

Sougetsu said as to remind her, Ouka replied shortly.

Embracing emotions she still couldn't understand, she looked through the documents she held in hands, checking their photos for the candidate.

"Just to make sure, one of those three is the candidate right?"

"Indeed."

"Which student is it?"

"Hmm... that's..."

When Ouka asked, Sougetsu meekly put his hand on his chin, then stared sharply at her.

"Not telling."

....

....

Without saying anything, Ouka turned around on her heel, with her shoulders trembling in anger she was going to leave the chairman's room.

"Fuhaha! It's confidential so I can't tell you!

"I was stupid to ask you seriously...!"

"Ah—wait, wait a second, one more thing to report to you. While you're a student, you're not to use your 《Vlad》, so that's that. Even if it's an emergency, I'll still get angry."

"I know without you telling me!"

**bang*!* Ouka opened the door and left.

Sougetsu looked at her back seeing her off, smiling for a while longer afterwards.

"Good grief, teenagers sure are difficult..."

He leaned heavily on his chair, resting his chin in his hands.

"...oh?"

Suddenly, when Sougetsu looked into a corner of the room, a mysterious shadow was sitting there.

"Lapis, since when were you there?"

"............"

"That's no good, you still don't have a contractor. Producing magic power meaninglessly is bad. Didn't I tell you that walking around alone is a big no?"

As if to respond to Sougetsu's call, the shadow wriggled in the darkness. The thing that looked like darkness itself took a human shape and quietly emerged from the shadows.

What appeared, was a girl that had everything from hair colour to clothing dyed azure. Her skin was so pale it looked sickly and was supple beyond comparison to that of a human.

The girl didn't blink, breathe, nor even sound a heartbeat, she just stood there expressionless.

"Your maintenance is hard; aren't you going to contract yet?"

"..........."

"Are you still hesitating... or..."

The girl didn't answer Sougetsu.

She just stood there breathlessly.

Still, with her eyes that looked as if they concealed a pitch black abyss, she watched Sougetsu.

He sensed something from the wordless girl and narrowed his eyes.

He had a smile on his face like the Cheshire Cat from a fairy tale.

"...I see. I'll consider it."

"..........."

"*Mistletoe* you really act shamelessly just like your name states... what an eerie child you are."

Sougetsu closed his eyes as if he fell asleep and a ominous laughter sounded from his throat.

The girl's expression didn't budge.

However, faint azure lights floated in the darkness around the girl like fireflies.

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Kusanagi Takeru is hopeless at everything other than swordsmanship.

He isn't clumsy or bad with them, he's just hopeless.

The Kusanagi family he was born into, was a famous military household 300 years ago. During an era when the sword was strongest, Kusanagi household's name resounded on many battlefields.

One and only swordsmanship, Peerless Kusanagi style. Kusanagi style was feared to the point where enemies raised a white flag the moment they were seen on the battlefield..

But that's a story of old.

In the modern times, swordsmanship is only useful as a martial art.

The fact is, that the pen is stronger than the sword and the gun is stronger than the pen.

This means of course, that the gun is stronger than the sword.

Swords are the worst, it's outdated scrap iron.

"Hey, it's the Small Fry's swordsmanship nut."

One of two students standing by the wall drank from his carton juice and pointed at Takeru walking down the corridor, smiling sarcastically.

"Oh, that idiot came to assault training with a plastic knife before."

"He must be joking, to come to assault without a gun. Also, look at that. Isn't that a real sword?"

Just as the student said, there was a sheathed sword hanging at Takeru's waist.

Almond eyes with visible white between iris and lower eyelid, tightly shut mouth long bangs that could be called jet black. His fierce appearance could be called like that of a samurai. On top of that there was a rattling sound when his sword hit the uniform's belt, making him extra noticeable.

"That's a Japanese sword, it was a main weapon long time before the war."

"Isn't that the sword that becomes useless after cutting down two, three people? Why would he hang such a thing there? Is he an idiot?"

"He IS an idiot, that's why he's been assigned to Small Fry Platoon."

Mockery echoed in the hallway.

Even as a raspy laughter reached him from behind, Takeru just stretched his back and advanced forward.

From behind he looked dignified

However, from the front, he wasn't far from looking like a demon.

His originally fierce eyes stood out as he made an expression of a furious murderer.

Surrounding students escaped from Takeru's path towards the walls because he was too scary.

“——?! Haa...?!”

Takeru noticed their reactions and changed his demonic expression.

"No good, no good. ...bear with it... bear it... Kusanagi Takeru...! You can't get angry just because they're mocking the sword...!"

He stretched his face grimacing, then sighed deeply.

"I'm no longer like my past self."

He put his hand on the sword hanging by the waist. It was the only weapon for Kusanagi Takeru. Out of necessity, it was the only method left for Kusanagi Takeru.

He studied just the basics of basics since his childhood. Other than his dexterity, he was more clumsy than anything. He had no literary talent, no talent for painting. His motor skills were excellent, but he has no sports sense, his field intuition is a minus as well.

Above all, when it came to handling firearms, he was hopeless.

His lack of knack for it is referred to as "curse". It's not only that he can't hit the target he aims for, it's on a completely different level. The bullets actually avoid their target. Even if he aims his muzzle straight at the target or fires from a very short distance, the bullet won't even graze the target. Even if he squeezes the trigger at point blank range, by some twist of fate a gun's failure and explosion of the gun's barrel awaits him.

Therefore, for Kusanagi Takeru his swordsmanship was his only talent remaining. His sword arm alone was good enough it could be said there was no one better than he is, but there was no use for such a thing in this day and age.

Takeru calmed himself down and took his hand off the sword.

"It can't be helped... I'll be abused and called incompetent, but this is the only thing for me."

If you were incompetent, you wouldn't enter a high level AntiMagic Academy and wouldn't aim to become a high-rank inquisitor. Takeru himself didn't think so.

However, he aimed for this profession for a very compelling reason.

Money.

Inquisitors are paid well.

To pay off the debt I inherited... on top of that my parents are no longer in this world... also for my beloved sister, no other job offers a salary big enough!

Takeru clenched his fist, even as tears flowed from his eyes as he stared at the sky outside, there was something like an earnest shine in them.

Forgive me, my ancestors... I need money to survive.

Now just to make money.

Unlike two years ago, that's all Takeru wanted at the moment.

To become an inquisitor it wasn't enough to enrol in AntiMagic Academy. The admission to school was essential, but just as there was a promotion test from middle school to high school, high school students had to earn points doing a harsh quota in order to finally become an inquisitor.

And that quota was the biggest problem.

"...ugh."

Takeru stood outside of the room, holding his abdomen discouraged.

On the door's plate there was a "35th Test Platoon" label.

Feeling a stomach pain he knocked on the door.

"You can enter～."

A blunt voice sounded from the other side of the door..

"Ah, wait a mo——"

Takeru heard a rushed, shrill voice, but he was already unable to stop himself from opening the door.

The instant the door opened, he understood nothing.

"..........."

"..........."

For some reason, there was a bunny girl in front of him.

Furthermore, she seemed to be in middle of changing clothes, two white bulges quite large for her stature were slightly visible. Her chest aside, he could see incredibly sensational thighs and rabbit ears that moved despite the fact they should have been inorganic.

Why is there a bunny girl in the school? Wasn't this school serious before? Am I dreaming?

Such questions never appeared in Takeru's head.

Takeru understood everything without even thinking of any questions, he made a tearful expression and stared towards the wall.

There, was a girl puffing up her cheeks with air "pffttt" and laughing.

Takeru understood the situation instantly.

Aah, this again... he thought.

"K-k-ky..."

The bunny girl's face was dyed red, it seemed like she was about to scream.

Based on her expression the next thing that'll come out will be "Kyaa", he was able to judge it would be so. In such a situation, Takeru was shedding tears for some reason.

"——Hey, why are you crying?!"

Seeing Takeru's unexpected reaction, the bunny girl instinctively performed a flying kick on him.

The kick hit him in the solar plexus and he was blown away together with the door into the corridor again.

While he was twitching and foaming at the mouth, the bunny girl closed on him and grasped his collar.

"What is the meaning of this? Why are you crying after seeing me as a bunny girl?! Thinking normally, I should have been the one to cry, shouldn't I?!"

"...no..."

"Has my appearance become so sad?! Or has it become so amusing?! Are you saying I don't have any charm!?"

"...no...! You've nice enough bod——"

"!!!!?? You Pervert! Pervert pervert!!"

As she strangled him strongly, Takeru's expression turned blue. The girl wailed with tears in her eyes.

The reason he couldn't explain himself properly was because of the spewing foam sprouting out of his mouth and because of the girl in lab coat who stood in the back laughing, taking pictures with a digital camera at high speed.

"I didn't expect you'd cry. Ahaha, I took some nice pictures."

"It's your doing again...! I told you to stop playing with Usagi——guah."

"Buuut, she's so weak at old maid, it's a punishment game. Her name's Usagi and her boobs are big too, isn't a bunny costume fitting her?"

"If I get involved in your cosplay hobby my body's going to end up like... this."

"Can it be that you let yourself get caught on purpose? Ah, you matched your timing to look at Usagi's immodest appearance? Ahaha, you pervert. Perverted brat."

After being ridiculed so much Takeru wasn't in the mood to get angry. The girl wearing a lab coat was checking the pictured on the digital camera with a grin.

"What to do I wonder. Maybe I'll spread these photos around. Ufu, ufufu, photos of a bunny girl and a guy who cries after seeing her. It's so hard to understand even for me which makes it exciting, ufufufu."

As the woman in lab coat contrived ominously, the half naked girl pounced at her with "Stop that!".

Outside of the noisy room, in the hallway Takeru shed teas.

They were the members of 35th Test Platoon also known as "Small Fry Platoon".

At the same time, they were the cause of Takeru's stomach ache.

Kusanagi Takeru was the captain of the "Small Fry Platoon".

After entering high school, there was only one, special way to be promoted within the school. Results in general education alone aren't enough to let you go up a grade.

The academy's test platoon system.

Unless you clear this course, you won't be able to go up to the second or third grade.

Test Platoon System makes the students more competitive and allows them to gain investigative experience. It's said to be the biggest challenge before becoming an inquisitor.

AntiMagic Academy's students are selected beforehand and organized into platoons, then made to resolve incidents in which magic was involved. The only things they receive from the Inquisition and the academy are weapon parts and information management. Weapon development and information collecting, investigation, strategy planning and combat has to be carried out by the students on their own.

It's the Inquisition itself that determines the structure of each platoon. Changing the members of platoon is not allowed unless there is a compelling reason to do so. It's not a system where the hopeless people could group up together.

For example,

"Shouldn't we think seriously about what do we do?!!”

A bunch like this.

One of the members, Saionji Usagi hit the work desk with abandon and yelled. Another member sitting in front of her, Suginami Ikaruga and Kusanagi Takeru raised their faces at the same time.

"It's been half a year since we enrolled in high school! Half a year! Captain, do you know how many points have we earned?"

Asked by Usagi, Takeru made an uncomfortable expression.

"...z-zero, I guess."

"That is right! Zero! Half a year and still zero! We need to cut it out and think of measures to overcome this situation!"

Takeru shrunk as Usagi's spirit overwhelmed him, he felt a stabbing stomach pain.

Ikaruga sitting beside him pouted tiredly.

"That being said, there's nothing we can do with only three of us, is there? With only three of us and missing members there isn't many cases that would go smoothly. And with members like this, too?"

Just as Ikaruga said, currently there was only three members in Small Fry Platoon. Originally test platoons are configurations of six members, Small Fry Platoon had three vacant spots. There were various reasons for the vacancies, but leaving a platoon meant expulsion.

There was one that caught a mental illness, another one was absorbed into a strange religion and one more abandoned the school early. And the remaining ones were——whether for better or worse, those three.

"At this rate we will really be forced to drop out! Are you all right with that?"

Saionji Usagi.

She aims to become the Inquisition's "Dullahan". Unlike her appearance suggest her sniping skills and bodily strength are exceptional, but she's guilty of making ridiculous blunders because of extreme stage fright. Her other abilities were all average, she made an effort but is not outstanding. She has a serious and prideful personality.

She has a complex about her name and gets angry at those who refer to her with it.

"Kusanagi is the only vanguard, it can't be helped."

Suginami Ikaruga.

She aims to become a "Reginn". She had perfect maintenance skills from the moment she was admitted, an eccentric who had talent only for that and enrolled as such. She had received a recommendation to immediately become an Inquisitor, but refused it. "Don't take away youth from a student" she said, with a reason no one knew whether it was serious or not, she remained in the school. While her maintenance skills were the top in the entire grade, she's only interested in weapons development and modification, on top of that the weapons she developed had a very peaky performance and were hard to use. From the platoon members, she was the only one who knew Takeru since middle school age.

"............I'm ashamed."

The last one, was the swordsmanship nut, Kusanagi Takeru.

He aims to join the "Spriggan". Zero shooting ability, zero maintenance skills, zero intelligence-gathering skills, zero academic ability. His only redeeming feature was close combat. He mastered everything related to swords but had almost no opportunity to use them. On top of that, when swords are mocked blood rushes to his head, putting him in a fatal disadvantage as he rushes headlong risking a honourable death due to recklessness.

Originally he wasn't the captain, after first one, then two more went missing, Takeru was forced to take over. Without a gun he was unable to influence fighting force too much so despite being a captain he didn't have much to say. He was a man who had nothing good about him.

"Do not immediately apologize like that! You're the captain! Please have more self-awareness!"

Usagi hit the desk repeatedly, her expression displayed frustration.

Takeru scratched his head with a finger.

"Even if you say that.. I'm not cut out for it in the first place."

"P-please do not say such things! We're not in a position to say such things! Also, I have never thought of you as unsuitable for the captain position!"

"——Do you have knotholes for eyes?!!"

"W-why do you have to accuse me of that?! Even though I intended to cheer him up."

As the two had a conversation that didn't seem to be working out, beside them, Ikaruga happily grinned.

"You see, about Usagi-chan."

"Please do not call me by my name!! Don't add '-chan'!!"

"Usagi sees herself in you, that's why she wants you to do your best."

"?! I don't really... but I really do think Kusanagi is suited for the captain position..."

"What part of him is?"

"Um... uhh, like he worries... a lot. He's working hard even though there are no results...? Also how he... feels about his comrades and has a good heart."

"See, isn't he just like you."

Usagi's face turned beet red soundly. Seeing her reaction, Ikaruga tried to deliver the final blow.

"A man who can only use a sword, a woman whose only talent is sniping. Moreover, both of you have shortcomings in your fields of expertise. You are so alike, you fit each other."

Good grief, Ikaruga shook her head. Usagi and Takeru looked towards her at the same time.

"What, why are both of you staring at me."

" "You're one to talk!!" "

"...oh my, really. I'm a comrade as well then. I see, yup, I think we can work together well."

" "Why so positive?" "

The two retorted to Ikaruga's serious attitude, the usual scene was back.

That's how thanks to meaningless chatter deviating from the topic, the Small Fry Platoon's activities usually end without them taking any action again.

"Anyway, without information we can't do anything! Got anything, Kusanagi?!"

"I do... but don't expect much."

Takeru took out a piece of creased, shabby paper and handed it to Usagi. It contained valuable information he somehow managed to collect in the past few days. The state of the paper shown just how much effort he put in. It was truly Takeru's blood, sweat and tears.

Usagi went "Mmm" as she checked the note, nodding

"Eh... Fifth district's Sakatake-san, is rumoured to have a potted plant that moves like tentacles... Somewhere in the back alley of school district there's a wall marked with a t runic symbol... Every morning after waking up, there's a smell of an old man on their pillows..."

"The plant is a mimosa. The runic words in the back alley are just graffiti of sharing an umbrella, there's no t among runic symbols. The pillows are just smelly. All of these can be easily written off as nonsense."

Ikaruga retorted after half of it was read out.

"All of this is nonsense!"

"...I'm ashamed. Still, I did my best."

"At this rate it'll turn really bad! Half a year more... and we need 200 points! Securing F-Class and E-Class Magical Heritage is just a drop in a bucket! Even the dirt would pile up and become a mountain, but we no longer have the grace to pile it up that way!!"

Usagi held her head and lamented over their hopeless situation.

Although the degree was different, Takeru felt the same.

There was a ranking for Magical Heritage and magical incidents. The more powerful and more history they have, the more points you get. F is 5 points, E is 10, D is 20, and C is 30 points. Students are not allowed to undertake higher tank cases.

That's true... you could gain a high amount of points just by dealing with F and E class incidents. If we did it from the start we could've piled up enough points to reach quota, but it's too late now. They no longer had the grace time... if only we had something big...

Even if he was to ignore whether it would succeed or not, he still couldn't come up with anything.

For the time being, Takeru held his head in the same manner Usagi did.

"...can't be helped."

Ikaruga brought up a 3D display and after moving the mouse she clicked on one of the folders. There, was high quality information written in it, such things that Takeru could never obtain no matter how hard he worked.

"It's an irregular type that was supposed to be disposed of during Witch-Hunt War but... it's information on a D-ranked Magical Heritage. It's not really my field, but I can't stand by watching. Ikaruga-oneesan will do her best."

" "Oooh!!" "

Takeru and Usagi raised their heads and leaned over to see the text on the display

"The target is the first book of Andolf Jaeger's poetry written by the beginning of Witch-Hunt War, the "Trackless Psalms". Only the original was supposed to be capable of generating magical power, but presumably Andolf himself poured magical power into the first edition's print in the office. It seems like it's content is a collection of nonsensical poems without uniformity, but if you read the poems from the beginning till the end, an encrypted operative procedure is invoked in the readers brain and triggers mental pollution magic contained in the book. Readers go mad, gouging their own eyes out, commit suicides by biting off their tongues and such."

After hearing such a astringent description from Ikaruga, both Takeru and Usagi turned pale.

If it was a Magical Heritage made to kill people and an irregular type, it certainly was something of D rank or higher. Andolf Jaeger's had many fans even these days, as it had a story behind it, it held a lot of value to collectors.

"The original has already been sealed, four out of five remaining first edition books are already in Inquisition's possession. One of the books disappeared from the scene while they were being seized, there's evidence that it was taken by someone, but the culprit hasn't been caught yet. That happened a week ago."

Ikaruga continued, as the two on the spot leaked a voice of admiration.

"The important part starts here. Just the other day the culprit who got away with the remaining book was located. A Magical Heritage trading organization has been rounded up a week ago, one of the underlings is on the run with the book and seems like he's trying to sell it to another organization.. The transaction is planned to be carried out tonight, midnight."

After she finished speaking, she went "fufun, how was it?" and proudly puffed up her chest.

"Amazin'... how on earth did you get all of that information? Rather, how did you identify the perpetrator, Suginami, just when did you investigate this?"

"I didn't. There's no way I could do such an elaborate investigation. It comes from our grade's current top performing 18th platoon."

"...ha?"

"I hacked 18th platoon's devices and extracted the info. It was a piece of cake."

"——wait, I just heard something I can't ignore. How could you do that."

"I even shifted the transaction date written in their file by one day. The one being hacked is at fault. Information management is part of a Banshee's duty as well, ha ha ha!"

"Don't 'hahaha' me! Isn't that a crime?!"

"According to school rules, you can use any means of intelligence gathering, it's all in accordance with the rules."

"That doesn't mean you should snatch away something someone else worked hard for!"

"It's too late to pull back. I've already sent application to Inquisition."

"Wha... even so, we should withdraw the application, right?! We should withdraw it now and go apologize to 18th platoon!"

Normally Takeru didn't object to fooling around, but this time he didn't intend on letting it go.

Just like Ikaruga said, stealing information from other platoons is allowed by school rules, but Takeru was very much age. When he was small, when his personality was forming there was someone because of whom Takeru suffered a trauma, it was someone who wouldn't stop prattling about wrongdoings.

Don't do anything bad, if you do, it'll definitely return to you.

That's what Takeru was taught. Even now he firmly hid that lesson in his heart.

As he pressed on Ikaruga to stop her from stealing, Usagi placed a hand on his shoulder.

"Kusanagi... I like that part of you."

"Usagi...! So you get it...!"

"...I told you, please don't call me by my name! And I meant that I like your sensitive side that is against illegal acts, okay? Do not misunderstand, all right?"

"Indeed! You should be rewarded for something you accomplish fair and square, that's how it should be."

Takeru advocated his ideals.

However, his happiness was fleeting as Usagi moved her face closer to his and gripped him strongly as if to crush his shoulders, starting at him with bloodshot eyes.

"I certainly said I like it. However! Now it is no time to quarrel! It is no time to argue whether it is right or wrong! At this rate we'll become complete losers!"

Takeru thought they already are a group of losers, but he did'tt say it.

Usagi excitedly admonished him.

"Are you okay with that!? Don't you want to make money?"

"Ugh... that's true, but..."

Takeru's heart shook greatly. Indeed, he had to make money. His household had huge financial problems. There's was his little sister too.

He had to clear his debt, there were living expanses. Honestly speaking, he wanted to do something about it, even if he had to sell his soul to the devil.

Takeru's stomach started to hurt again, as if it was being squeezed by something.

That's when. Suddenly, the platoon room's door was vigorously opened.

"Gooood afternoooooonnnn!! Children!!"

The platoon members' gazes shifted to door at high speed.

After confirming who was the person suddenly appearing, Takeru and Usagi turned pale.

In there, stood an owner of white, long and flowing hair, his face was beautiful enough to be called gaudy. The person to whom roses would serve as a good background has decided to make a wacky pose in front of the doors.

AntiMagic Academy's chairman, Ootori Sougetsu.

"Chairman...?!"

"Indeed it is I, the chairman! Surprised? Or did I fire a blank?"

After saying that coldly, Sougetsu laughed heartily with a "HAHAHA!".

Why was the person with the highest authority in the academy in a place like this.

Seeing the scene which looked like a lie, the two's spirit was astir.

"Hey, this is bad he must've heard what we said... this guy came in with a perfect timing.."

"L-let's not conclude it so early... we cannot be sure of it yet... let's calm down, we need to be calm."

The two whispered to each other while sweating profusely.

Unlike those two, Ikaruga turned around on the chair, pointing her legs towards Sougetsu and snorted.

"What do you want. Do you have so much time, you visit a bar-like platoon like ours?"

"...wonderfully expressed, Ikaruga-kun. Also, I'm this school's chairman. Should that be the first thing you say? Shouldn't you show me more respect?"

When Sougetsu protested brightly, Ikaruga looked at him with contempt as if she wanted to spit on him.

Takeru broke out in cold sweat.

"I respect only the ones I love. So, what did you come here for."

She spat out words of abuse in a quick succession, it was inexcusable now as Ikaruga's attitude was rudeness itself. Speaking of on whom the responsibility falls, that would be Takeru as the captain. He could only tremble in panic.

The chairman thought of Ikaruga's harsh rebuttal as funky and made an easygoing smile.

"Ha ha ha! Cheeky as ever. Nothing much, I just came for a little inspection. After all, you 35th Test Platoon quite a reputation."

"I see. So you came to worship the faces of the dropouts. Did you come to fire us?"

"No no. What reaches my ears is just bad rumours, but I think it's a sharp, wonderful platoon."

Sougetsu put a hand on his chin and walked through the room, he peeked in each member's face.

First Ikaruga with whom he was already acquainted, through Usagi, in the end he stood in front of Takeru.

Unconsciously, Takeru stood upright and unmoving like a house's pillar.

Sougetsu leaned so close their noses almost touched and stared intently at Takeru's face

"Ahh, it's s been a while hasn't it, Kusanagi-kun. The last time we met face to face was during the middle school entrance ceremony wasn't it?

"I-indeed, chairman."

Sougetsu spoke to him in friendly manner. Just like Ikaruga, Takeru already knew Sougetsu. During the entrance ceremony he was called to chairman's room once.

The conversation they had back then... his heart shrank as he remembered it. He had to admit that Takeru from back then was a naive kid who made a considerably rude declaration

If he remembered well it was "I'll knock you down from that seat"... or something like that.

It was unthinkable for him to do that now. It filled him with dread.

As disturbed Takeru couldn't respond, Sougetsu made a questioning look.

"Oh? Were you that kind of character? ...you calmed down considerably haven't you. The you from the past had a look in his eyes as if he wanted to kill me."

"Ha-hahaha... sorry 'bout that. Back then... I was in puberty."

Scared to death, he apologized earnestly.

Sougetsu laughed lightly hit Takeru's head.

"I don't know what changed your state of mind, but it's a good thing. I wish my tomboy daughter would follow suit."

Sougetsu laughed gently as if he was looking at his own child.

Looking at him again like this, he was still unable to tell whether Sougetsu was a man or a woman. In the first place he didn't state he was a man. Rather than having lots of mysteries about him, he was a mystery himself. That was the impression students had when they looked at Ootori Sougetsu.

After examining Takeru with a grin, he nodded.

"In any case, I cannot compliment you for your results. I won't pursue who is responsible for that, but with three dropouts the survival of your platoon is uncertain. I want to avoid that as well. After all, I really like you guys."

Takeru's stomach started screaming.

"Therefore, while it is unusual, I have prepared supplemental personnel for 35th platoon."

All the members raised their faces.

Just because there was a problem with point acquisition, there shouldn't have been any member changes allowed.

Usagi whispered to Takeru.

"What is going on...? It's unheard of to have replenishment personnel."

"Even if you ask me... for now, it seems like he didn't hear our conversation earlier."

As Takeru and others were wondering about it, Sougetsu turned towards the doors and called out "Come in".

After a few seconds, the steel-made cold doors were slowly opened without any sound

"————"

Momentarily, Takeru's heart almost stopped.

The person he could never forget has appeared. Someone who could be called the beginning and the end of all for Takeru.

The absolute strength he saw in the darkness, two years ago.

The detestable existence that shattered Takeru's confidence.

There was no way he could forget.

That hair, saying it was colour of sunset would be appropriate, the owner of the hair that looked like sinking sun.

A beautiful girl that seemed like she came out of a myth.

"An ex-Dullahan, Ootori Ouka-kun. She was admitted into high school at this time. Well, get along well."

"Regards."

"By the way, she's my daughter! We look alike right? Like for example our cute noses and eyebrows! As you can see, she's my daughter through and through☆."

"I'm his adopted daughter. Don't make a misunderstanding that we're connected by blood."

When the girl named Ootori Ouka pointed out, Sougetsu put on a mysterious smile. They didn't know what made his tension rise so much, but no one is ever bothered by it even though he acts like that in front of the students.

Usagi who was beside Takeru seemed to have been familiar with Ouka and suddenly made a dissatisfied expression.

"Ootori Ouka... I know her. She's a super honour student who obtained qualifications to enter Inquisition in middle school age in just a year and a half."

"..........."

"A genius with influential family, I can't stomach it... she got promoted without putting much effort... you think so too, right?"

"..............."

"...Kusanagi?"

Since she wasn't replied to as she sought his consent, Usagi looked up beside her at Takeru's face.

Takeru's mouth was shut tight, his line of sight was captured by Ootori Ouka appearance and he stared at her without blinking.

"Are you acquainted?"

"...yeah... an ex-classmate."

He softened his expression and shortly answered. Usagi felt that there was something amiss, and looked towards Ikaruga. If Ouka was in the same class as Takeru, then so was Ikaruga.

Ikaruga stared directly at Ouka and expressionlessly asked Sougetsu.

"Why did Ouka Ootori stop being a Dullahan and was enlisted in our platoon? You ignored the rules and enlisted her here... the must be a reason for that, right?"

"...hmm, about that."

When Sougetsu put a finger on his forehead, Ouka took a step forward moving closer to the platoon members.

"Sorry, I can't tell you the reason."

"We're going to work together as comrades now. Isn't it natural for us to compromise??"

It didn't seem like Ikaruga was making any compromise, she still said it.

It seemed like Ouka thought about it for a second, but,

"That has nothing to do with you all."

She closed her eyes and answered clearly.

"You haven't changed, have you."

Ikaruga shook her head and didn't say anything else.

It seemed like Ouka wasn't compatible with Ikaruga, clearly Ikaruga was a bit annoyed by her attitude.

That was when Ouka noticed Takeru's line of sight.

He tried to avert his gaze in a hurry, but being stared at by Ouka's clear eyes he faltered and spoke.

"I-It's been a while, Ootori."

"..........."

"...been healthy...?"

Ouka squinted at Takeru as he asked the question.

Recalling from back then, Takeru broke out in unpleasant sweat. The impression he made two years ago was honestly the worst. After all, at the end of the deathmatch when they fought one against one he talked big, but was done in to the point he was unable to move his hands or feet.

They never had a normal conversation, but initial impression was poor enough.

"..........."

Ouka looked at his face while bleeding vigilance and dislike.

So he was hated after all. Takeru's shoulders drooped.

Immediately after.

Ouka opened her mouth facing towards him.

"............who are you?"

............**thud**.

Not only Takeru's shoulders drooped, suffering a setback he fell on his knees on spot.

Prior to being hated, Kusanagi Takeru wasn't even remembered by Ootori Ouka.

Chapter 2 - Sortie! Small Fry Platoon!

Outside of the school's premises, city centre's backstreet beside the venture company buildings that had recruitment posters on it, in the corner of the street was a seemingly deserted building.

The 35th Platoon's members were already set up on their positions.

An unfinished building from 10 years ago that lacked any special features which used to be a trading site. Currently no companies have used it and rooms on all floors were vacant.

The objective was seizure of a D-rank Magical Heritage, "Trackless Psalms".

In the end Ouka had joined them and as four they started the mission as planned.

『"For the time being, wouldn't it be better to be on standby together with me on your first day?"』

During the briefing, when Ouka had gone as far as to dismantle a gun that was already after maintenance, Ikaruga asked her.

『"...no. It's not a problem, I'll participate."』

『"Is that so? Fine by me. Aren't you quite motivated here?"』

『"No matter the mission, it's my principle to take it on at full force. Don't worry. I have no intention of getting in your way. I'll try my best to move accordingly to Captain's orders."』

As she assembled her gun quickly, Ouka moved her gaze towards Takeru.

Takeru who was doing practice swings and such with a special baton noticed the stare, and started blinking in surprise.

『"Show me what you can do... Kusanagi Takeru."』

These words Ouka said were enough to put heavy pressure on Takeru.

"...haa."

Unable to completely get rid of anxiety, he sighed.

Ikaruga remained in the platoon's room and through wireless she was in charge of communication. In change of sniping, Usagi was waiting on the roof of the opposite building. Ouka went through the front to sneak in.

Takeru was going to charge in through the back door.

"...doesn't seem like anybody's guarding the back door... how's your side, Ootori?"

《"........ No sign of enemy here either."》

"O-okay, let's go."

The communication switched over and Ikaruga, the operator cut in.

《"The trading organization shouldn't be that great, at most they're just be about size of a small gang."》

"How can you tell?"

《"Think like the thug that had fled with "Trackless Psalms". He knows how the connections between organizations work, the bigger the organization the bigger the risk."》

Certainly, Ikaruga's speculation was convincing.

If their enemy was a small group, it was the best for them.

And the target Magical Heritage's class was high too, if the enemy organization was too strong their authorization for dispatch from Inquisition would have been revoked. Since they have accepted their application, it meant the Inquisition had speculated it was on the level students can deal with.

But, it was still dangerous. The number of deaths among the students every year was by no means small. While it has been identified as a low risk mission, thinks do happen by chance. On alert by the back door, he entered the building and joined Ouka

"They're quite a careless bunch... is the trade really going to happen here?"

"I'll go first. I leave my back to you Captain. Permission?"

"S-sure."

Covering each other, they moved forward gradually.

That being said, Takeru didn't bring a gun with him having only a baton and a sword by his waist, he didn't look the part. Using a baton in closed spaces was advantageous, but in majority of the situation a gun has had the advantage.

Ouka on the other hand, had a handgun and a baton as well. The handgun was an automatic one, even though it was the same model as the one used by the police of this city, it was made by Alchemist for Inquisition so it had been improved and modified into an anti-magic firearm. It prided itself of its compact size and stable hit rate. It's handle was structured so that it fits well even in a woman's or a child's hands. Instead, the low firepower of the handgun was its drawback.

Currently it was loaded with anaesthesia bullets.Normally, test platoons can only carry anaesthesia and processed mithril ammunition with them. Mithril bullets' usage was limited to fighting against enemy witches and people armed with a Magical Heritage. In any other case than that they weren't allowed to use lethal bullets.

While it was an excellent sub-weapon, but clearly, it was lacking in firepower. Since they couldn't determine what was the organization purchasing the Magical Heritage, it would be better to be well prepared but...

Ouka chose the handgun she was familiar with.

"..........."

She embodied calmness itself, and didn't make any unnecessary moves. Ouka walked up to the cover point, she had killed all the sounds of her footsteps and did not have a single opening. As expected of an ex-inquisitor, she gave an impression of someone trained.

Ouka gestured him that it's clear.

Takeru showed her a signal for "wait" and spoke to the intercom.

"Usagi, how is it there?"

《"S-s-sev-seventh floor, office. L-light is on, The number... thr-t-two people."》

Usagi seemed to be nervous like usual.

"Okay, seventh floor it is."

《"——I-I am not really impatient, I am not nervous e-either! Do not think I am! I-I am just c-c-ca-careful."》

"Who even asked you about that, I just wanted to know the situation inside...?"

After saying that much, Takeru noticed something odd.

"Two people? Is the other party alone?"

《"It would appear so. I can only see through the window so they might be hidden. H-have I messed up?"》

The client was alone. It couldn't be, maybe the organization had the object passed through a collector without direct contact. In that case it would be a convincing reason as for why there's only two... but was that really possible?

《"...wh-what are we going to do? C-can I take them down already? I-I shall do it, I shall! I-i-it's a piece of ca-ca-cake!"》

It wasn't convincing when said by someone as they bite their tongue.

"Wait wait. We have to get to the office first."

When it came to Usagi's sniping, the only thing that could be trusted completely was her hit rate, but they couldn't be careless as there could be more enemies inside.

"Ootori, go around from the other side of the passage. We'll rush in after the signal."

《"............"》

"Hey, Ootori?"

Ouka was squat down in the cover point and looked at the ceiling. Ahead of her line of sight was just a ventilation outlet, nothing else.

What is she doing...?

Just when he thought she dazed off, she had gestured towards him instead of using the intercom.

《"Roger."》

A moment later, she signalled with her hand and disappeared.

So far so good, it would be good if it ended without a hitch like this.

Takeru went up the stairs while maintaining vigilance and arrived at the seventh floor.

He had confirmed the entrance to the target room.

"......!"

A human figure, just one. The enemy held a handgun and let out smoke from his cigarette.

"Enemy found... one person at the room's entrance.

He reported to other members and waited for Ouka to arrive at the opposite side of the passage.

If they defeat the lookout and rush in, the guys inside the office will most likely notice it. Considering the risk of a shoot-out beginning the moment they rush in, it was better to rush in in conjunction with Usagi's sniping.

"Th-then, we'll go at more or less the same time. Usagi will take out the two people inside after making count to three for a signal. I'll rush in to become a decoy as the signal comes, when the lookout directs his attention to me Ootori will shoot him from behind. Meanwhile I'll rush inside... something like that... is that fine?"

《"Roger."》

《"T-that is quite a reasonable strategy from you. I u-un-understand? I-it is a-alright there's no problem I shall do it. B-by the way d-do I shoot after counting to zero? O-o-or maybe I d-don't count to zero and shoot? W-wh-which is i——"》

《"You're the one counting so it doesn't matter～. Well, do your best～."》

The person saying it was extremely motivated despite the fact she wasn't involved in the operation, he pretended not to hear that voice.

Takeru waited for Ouka to appear on the other side.

Meanwhile, although it was faint, he was able to hear the voice from the transaction site.

"...I hope you weren't followed, were you?"

"Don't worry. We have won over the person in charge of this office before we borrowed it. There won't be any troubles for you. I'd prefer not to use this one here."

"I don't mind if you think of it as of an optional reward. You can use or sell it. Rather than that, I've heard your organization was crushed by Inquisition, is it really all right?"

"I told you there's no problem dammit."

Because the wall was thin, the voices carried over.

Judging by the content there was no doubt. The information Ikaruga had stolen was correct.

"...so, have you brought it?"

"It's as you see."

A sound of clothes rustling.

"...indeed. Well done. The reward has been already left in the specified location."

"What are you going to do with something like this? Isn't it just fragments?"

Takeru furrowed his brows as he stood with his ear against the wall

Fragments? It's not "Trackless Psalms"?

"That has nothing to do with you. Don't try to stick your nose into our reasons."

"...what a creepy woman... by the way, there's something else I want you to buy."

"......?"

"Hey, show her."

Rustling again.

"...what's that."

"One of the "Trackless Psalms" first edition books. I sneaked it out during confusion. It's definitely better stuff than that crap. How about it, you can name your own price."

"..really, how boundlessly stupid you guys are."

It could be felt that the atmosphere has turned tense inside.

"There are limits to how much you can underestimate Inquisition. Did you bunch think they wouldn't notice?"

"...ah?"

"The reason your organization was destroyed was because of that book. As long as one book is missing they're going to chase you in a frenzy, to the ends of hell."

When he heard the disturbing development inside, sweat had ran down Takeru's cheek

They'll notice the assault. It would be very bad if they noticed and were on alert.

《"Reached appointed position. Your orders.》

Ouka reported to him at the very last moment. Takeru picked up the the baton he held against his waist, holding it firmly he switched on the button for electric current.

"Everyone ready?"

《"No problem."》

《"W-w-wh-whenever!"》

As he heard the replies, he put strength into his legs.

And the moment his eyes narrowed sharply

"Operation——start."

Takeru jumped out from the corner to draw the enemy's attention.

Of course, the enemy noticed him and tried to point his gun's muzzle towards him.

Holding the baton poised to the left, Takeru rushed straight towards the enemy without stopping.

A suicide attack. Of course, a fake one though.

Two shots from the rear. The enemy had collapsed instantly after the gunfire.

Ouka must have done everything according to the plan

At the same time,

《"I-I have done it! I have taken down the two! As expected of me, have you seen it, Kusanagi??"》

Because of Usagi's impatience the sniping's timing was little off, but there was no problem. Takeru passed through the fallen enemy and rushed towards the office, then stood with his back against the wall by the door.

When Ouka had quickly nodded in his direction, Takeru kicked down the door and rushed into the office.

"——Inquisitors, freeze!"

Everything ended smoothly, Takeru felt happy inside.

They've gotten their first points. While it was still far from promotion's quota, with this, there was still hope...

....

"...eeh?"

Seeing the scene spreading on the other side of the door, Takeru was shocked.

Certainly, he confirmed it. He confirmed it with Usagi through radio before rushing in. Two people, both taken down, she said. He definitely hasn't misheard.

And yet...

For some reason, in front of him there were seven Onii-sans pointing the black guns' muzzles in his direction.

"Umm... Usagi...-san?"

《"What is it. Did you see it already, the dumbasses I took down! Amazing isn't it, I hit them both in their brains! Ooho hoho ho!!"》

"Uhh, right now in front of me... rather than two, I have seven Onii-sans surrounding me.."

《"...that's impossible! I have certainly taken them down?! Two men in security guard uniforms!"》

Without even thinking about it, Takeru understood what happened

"You... ain't that the building on the opposite side."

《"...ahh."》

"Didn't ya just shoot two security guards?! Why would you shoot security guards, can't you tell by looking?!"

《".....................t-t-th-these things.........happen sometimes."》

As if!! It would be no joke if these weren't anaesthesia bullets!!

While Takeru wanted to retort, this too was a captain's error. He knew right from the start that Usagi's hopeless syndrome could cause her to take actions normally impossible.

To be exact, there were nine enemies. Seven of them were mafia-like men, they wore coats and hats so that their faces weren't visible—— and a silhouette by the window that was probably a woman's.

And, one more.

Seeing the most unexpected presence, Takeru was unable to rid himself of the haunting question. Why was such a thing there.

A humanoid covered in clunky armour. A round silhouette much bigger than a human.

There was no doubt. It was yet-unmanned, but that was truly a heavily-armoured infantry reinforcing exoskeleton Inquisition was using in the past... a "Dragoon".

What the hell! I haven't heard about an organization that could bring out one of these...!

No matter how you think about it, it's not something a group of thugs would have. It seemed like both Ikaruga's and Inquisition's judgement was in the wrong. This was too dangerous for a mere D-rank Magical Heritage trade. Unlike the seven men upset by the sudden intervention, the coated woman had already opened the window and put a foot on its edge.

"Isn't it just like I told you, I'll be going back. I leave the clean-up to you."

After saying that, the woman kicked off the window. She looked at Takeru right before she jumped off.

"!!——Wait!"

Takeru tried to rush to her, but the woman had jumped before that. This was the building's seventh floor. For a normal human it wouldn't end with just an injury.

But, before Takeru could run up to the window, the leader-like man aimed this gun at him.

"Don't you move..."

"Th-this guy said he's an inquisitor. Isn't this bad?!"

"Don't panic. We've got a Dragoon here. Also, look well at the guy, he's not from regular inquisition, just the test platoon, right? You're AntiMagic Academy's student aren't you? What is a newbie like you doing, coming to a place like this."

A man that was the leader and five men that followed him. In addition to that, in the corner of the room there was a man looking like a thug who was holding "Trackless Psalms" and continued to grumble something.

The situation was hopeless. Although he had confidence to win one against one even if he used a baton, but he couldn't stand against seven people with a Dragoon.

"Ootori... don't come in."

So as not to let enemy hear it Takeru spoke in a voice so quiet it seemed like he was exhaling.

If they noticed there was one more person behind him, Ouka would end up being involved.

The enemy leader was smiling fearlessly. He had a smile of a someone certain of his victory. Takeru saw that smile many time, it was a smile that didn't hide the person's nature. Were it be Takeru from the past, he would give priority to his pride and rush right at him.

"Ha-haha...um... I-I got lost a little on my way home from school."

However, the current Takeru didn't do any reckless things. Rather, he couldn't.

He made a forced smile and told an excuse.

"I see, you got lost huh. That's troubling isn't it."

"Y-yeah. Well... ha-hahaha"

"HAHAHAHAHA!!"

"Aha-ahahaha...ha."

"What the hell you're laughing for——it's already a checkmate for you, bastard."

Next moment, their leader stuck out his tongue and put his finger on the trigger.

Takeru followed that movement with his eyes.

What to do? Give it a shot?

He dropped the baton and touched the sword's handle he had by his waist with his fingertips.

Laughter welled up in his chest as he thought of it. It wasn't realistic. A sword winning against a gun, how foolish. If it was him from a few years ago, he would have rushed in, but now he knew his own standing.

I can take out two... three people at best. And I'll probably get hit by few rounds by then.

The close quarters were good, but their numbers were bad. It was a literally a "desperate" attack.

There wasn't a single method left to him that would allow survival through combat

...no.

There was one, a way out for Takeru.'

No... that's no good. That would end up disastrous to me anyway...!

Having only one way out, Takeru was distressed.

A "technique" prohibited by the laws of Kusanagi Swordsmanship school that was available to him was his only way to break out through this situation.

Takeru shook his head and his fingertips let go of the sword.

Most likely Ikaruga realized in what situation was he in and has contacted the Inquisition, requesting a Spriggan's dispatch.

Until the Spriggans come he'll stall by talkin——

"? Hey, look at that guy, is he carrying a sword there? He has no gun but is equipped with a sword instead! Gahahaha, seriously? Unbelievable, is friggin right in the head?"

One of the enemy's comrades insulted Takeru and pointed at him.

Prompted by that, the bunch around him started laughing.

"Aren't inquisitors old-fashioned these days!! It's a terrifying, great samurai!"

"Even the general police is obligated to carry a mobile and a gun, he sure's got guts! Are you even sane, brat?!"

Gyahahahaha. As the laughter full of contempt echoed, Takeru stopped the movement of his hand, opening his eyes wide.

He's crazy. Outdated. Say -degozaru for us.

A flurry of insults. The voices he had heard many times before.

In response to these voices, a shadow was slowly cast on Takeru's face.

Probably since she noticed the situation, Ikaruga's voice had come from the intercom.

《"This is bad... Kusanagi, don't listen to them. I can somehow tell what's happening, if you get angry here it'll turn into the worst situation."》

"............I get it......!!"

《"Try to convince them. Prolong the conversation. You're no longer your past self, are you. I admit that my investigation was lacking for this mission, please——"》

"I get it...!!"

Starting with Takeru's toes, hot air like flames had crawled up slowly. Takeru himself felt his body and head heat up, clenching his teeth.

In this worst-case scenario Takeru's bad nature had started to reappear.

Bear it... bear with it...! I'm different from my past self, I can't snap at this happening these days...!! It's obvious that sword is inferior to the gun and you know it, Takeru! Let go of this outdated pride! You can bear with something like this, it'll all turn out well...

He bit his lips strong enough to have blood flow from them and tried to calm down his spirit through pain.

It's not like it started now... endure this... endure, endure, endure endure endure...!

Takeru desperately endured the anger.

If he snaps here, he won't only make trouble for himself but also for others. That alone has to be avoided, Takeru swallowed the anger.

——But.

"Swordsmanship, huh. What's it useful for? You and that scrap iron can't win against neither guns nor magic. Enough of this, writhe, you scrap iron bastard."

With these words the leader had spoke.

There was a sound of something snapping inside of Takeru's head.

《"Aaahh... it's over. Do whatever you want."》

Ikaruga's sigh no longer reached Takeru.

"Worry not, we won't kill you right away. Not until we sell your organs, bastard. What, we'll just put some holes in your legs. Since yer a samurai you can endure that much can't ya, eh?"

The enemy's voice had no longer reached him and the situation had continued to proceed, unstoppable.

The leader had put strength to the finger on the trigger.

At the same time, Takeru's fingers slowly had touched the sword again.

Along with the muzzle's flash, the bullet popped out of it, aiming to pierce through Takeru.

However——

The bullet, just like in a slow motion video,

Sloo...wly continued to drop its speed.

It wasn't just the bullet. Everything reflected in Takeru's field of vision had its speed decrease, uniformly entering slow motion.

The spark from the muzzle. Hair swaying from the impact, dust dancing in the air, the voice of the crowd outside the building, everything.

Takeru's body was no exception, the hand pulling out the sword from its sheath had its speed heavily drop, as if he struggled in the cement.

The world had become stagnant. The world had become slow.

However, what was happening now was complete opposite of that.

The world surrounding him hasn't changed its speed, the time flowed normally.

What has sped up——

Leaving everything behind——

Was Takeru's brain.

That was all.

* * *

In the past, in order to obtain strength Takeru had received the teachings of a certain "Monster".

That Monster, an "ex-" human, was in the modern times the only person who had completely mastered the swordsmanship called Kusanagi Double-Edged style.

Two schools had existed in the Kusanagi style. One known to the public was Kusanagi True-Light style that was handed down in Takeru's household, it was a sword of murder of which purpose was to kill other people.

In contrast to it, Double-Edged style was something for killing monsters that were rampant approximately a thousand years ago. They were techniques for opposing things that weren't human.

In the modern times there were very few who knew the latter one.

In order to learn that Double-Edged style, Takeru had come in front of the Monster and requested.

——I want win against a gun with a sword.

——What should I do to win against a gun with a sword?

『...Takeru, that's impossible. Human body can't move as fast as a bullet. No matter how much you train, no matter how much swordsmanship you learn, you can't keep up with the bullet's speed."』

——Why can't the sword win?

『"That's cuz' its too fast for you to see. If you're skilled and have great luck, you might be able to block one bullet, but that's it. Give up."』

......even so, I want to win.

『"Impossible I said. You'll just die"』

——Even so, I want to win.

『"Give up on that. Sword can't do it."』

——Even so, I want to win!

『"Don't you get it. It's absolutely impossible.』

——Even so, I want to win!!

....

....

『"One."』

『"There's only one method. In exchange, if you continue to use it you'll regret this. Not only yourself, but you'll also hurt the ones important to you."』

——I don't care, teach me!

『"...very well, I will acknowledge your resolve. Listen Takeru, the thing you have to train the most is not your body."』

——?

『"You see, to surpass your limitations... it's here, Takeru."』

——Where?

『"Here."』

『"Inside your head your flea-sized brain. "』

* * *

——**screeeeeechhh*——!*

Hearing a loud metallic sound, everyone in the location revealed astonishment.

They didn't believe the scene in front of them, that's the kind of expression they made.

The leader had definitely shot with his gun. Without doubt he shot straight at Takeru. At this distance he wouldn't miss. Even a complete amateur, a child would have trouble missing from this distance.

And yet, Takeru was unscathed.

He didn't fall. He didn't bleed. He had no hole in him anywhere.

What was there, was a bullet sheared in half rolling on the floor and Takeru's silent figure standing there with a sword drawn.

"...w...hat?"

The leader's expression twitched and he fired a second bullet in rapid succession.

That too, let out a metallic sound and didn't hit the target.

It took them a while to acknowledge the fact that Takeru had stopped the bullets with a sword.

Everything was shrouded in heavy silence.

"...you said it..."

Takeru's voice tore through the silence. Heavy, deep, an arrogant voice one wouldn't imagine could come from the cowardly boy from a moment earlier.

"...you said 'scrap iron'... prepare yourself, bastards."

He raised his face slightly, the peeking out from behind the long bangs, looking like a demon.

Everyone on spot cringed with fear.

Because a single demon holding a sword stood in front of them.

Takeru shouted. Quietly yet wild, like a demon's roar.

"Kusanagi Double-Edged style initiate, Kusanagi Takeru.

Neither average nor shit——one-sidedly, I'll cut you up ."

So powerfully, not one person could move.

Takeru was completely prepared for battle; his fighting instincts took over. Poised with his sword horizontally, he exuded a force that made people think they'd get slashed the moment they moved or took a breathe.

The seven men solidified.

Poising his sword horizontally, Takeru was in full battle readiness. His fighting instincts have surfaced and were they to move even a little, it seemed he would slash them just as he powerfully declared.

The seven men have froze on spot.

They still were unable to believe Takeru had cut down the bullets.

It was natural. there was no way there was a human could pull of a skill straight out of a manga.

However, Kusanagi-style was an absurd swordsmanship school. that mastered techniques like those in the manga.

What Takeru had triggered was a fully-fledged swordsmanship technique, "Soumatou". The origin of Kusanagi True-Light style was the aberrant Kusanagi Double-Edged style swordsmanship. A heretical sword, made to allow destroying the fantastical creatures called demons that are confirmed to have died out several hundred years ago, by using a human's own body.

That, was the "Soumatou".

Simply put, it temporarily releases the limiter in user's brain, accelerating it's processing capability. A person placed on the border of life and death, falling into extreme conditions, notes an increase in utilization of their brain.

They say, like a revolving lantern their memory flows through their mind.

They say, the world starts to look like it's in slow motion.

They say, the conflagration causes them to use incredible strength.

These phenomena result from the emergency activation of the brain, there are also theories that it can activate from a malfunction. But all of it, is power provided by the survival instinct.

The Soumatou which activates that instinct can be called a forbidden move of Kusanagi-style.

The men of the Kusanagi family have devised this technique to fight demons.

"This guy...!!"

The leader lifted his lowered handgun, poised it and fired again.

He continued to pull the trigger until his magazine was empty.

It didn't reach——nothing reached.

Only a loud metallic sound of bullets ricocheting could be heard.

"...........hii."

In the middle of gun smoke filling the room, Kusanagi Takeru was alive and well.

Takeru smiled, showing no sign of being troubled.

At a glance, the battle had turned around, but while Takeru looked like he could afford much more, it wasn't like it appeared to be for his body.

This Soumatou's activation's physical drive causes the body to bear a ridiculous burden. If he moves too forcibly the meat will be cut apart and the bones will break. Since bodily performance hasn't improved, it was a move that led to self-destruction.

The body couldn't keep up with brain being "serious".

So far Takeru had a several muscle fibres torn in his leg. His bones were aching, at this rate they would crack and be crushed.

But, however,

"...this is nothing."

As he was now, Takeru left reasonable thinking like that behind.

Takeru who had an extraordinary pride ever since young, ended up having blood rushing into his head whenever swordsmanship was being ridiculed. Since he was very small, he was known as a problem child in the neighbourhood.

Starting with his defeat in the second year of middle school, Takeru had finally re-examined his own behaviour and was able to change himself. His personality changed for a calm one and he himself looked like a timid boy to others.

However, after he reaches the limits of his patience, blood rushes to his head and his original violent personality surfaces.

"I'll prove to you now whether it's scrap iron or not. It ain't necessary for you to come at me one by one. Come at me all together."

"Hii-hiii"

"Don't think it'll rust. I'll show you a slash from which not even blood will remain on the blade."

Showing a glimpse of canines, Takeru laughed with a furious expression.

After he's become like this, no one could stop him.

Even if all seven thugs lower their heads on spot, even if they start up the Dragoon or the Spriggans arrive he probably would be unable to suppress his anger.

If there was someone who could stop Takeru,

If there was someone, that would be——

《"Onii-chan, don't make... such scary face."》

Just one person. Takeru's only close relative, his little sister.

"——Wha-!!"

Hearing voice from the intercom, Takeru raised hysteric voice.

With such simple words, the anger welling up inside of Takeru was blown away somewhere.

What decided of it was "Onii-chan".

《"...have you calmed down? Kusanagi."》

"Eh?! Uh?! Just now, e-eh?!"

《"It was my voice, you siscon. How was it? Was it similar?"》

Being told that, Takeru thought that the tone of voice was considerably different from his little sister's. In the first place, it was absolutely impossible for his little sister to be with Ikaruga.

Takeru sighed with relief. Were he to remain like that, surely it would have become irreversible. Not in a meaning where he would kill the enemy, but rather that Takeru's body would have become irreparable. Thinking normally, even with Soumatou activated he wouldn't be able to win against seven people with guns. If they all fired at the same time there would be nothing he could do and would self-destruct before cutting everything down. Kusanagi's swordsmanship wasn't so convenient in usage.

Grateful for being stopped, Takeru attempted to lower his sword.

《"So, what are you going to do with this situation?"》

Being told that, he looked around him and saw seven thugs aim their guns at Takeru with frightened expressions on their faces.

Since he had threatened them with a frightening expression, they all thought of taking him down before he could take get to them and already had their fingers on the triggers.

Now I've done it. He concluded.

"A-aha, that before was a joke! Ittsu a jyouku! The thing about cutting so that there's no blood was obviously a joke. See, I've got that certain disease specific to people in puberty where I blurt out things wanting to act cool, aha-ahahaha."

After showing them a scene of bullets being cut in mid-air, it just wouldn't pass as a joke.

Being shown a power beyond what an ordinary person can use, it was natural they would attack in a group.

W-what do I do? Drop my weapon and raise my hands? Or maybe I should prostrate? I'm good at that but I think it's too late to apologize.

As thoughts rotated in Takeru's head at high speed,

"*parin*...

Suddenly, the only fluorescent lamp attached at the ceiling broke.

Because the visibility had suddenly darkened, everyone's thinking in the location stopped for an instant.

That's when Takeru saw it.

Over the seven's heads, from the vent the ceiling was equipped with.

Something sunset-coloured fell down.

"Gughh!!"

It landed on enemy's head.

Everyone looked towards the man who fell over.

There, was a single girl, as her skirt and sunset hair had floated softly, she kicked kicked the man.

An incredibly out-of-place beautiful girl.

Her long hair that was floating in the air had slowly fallen in accordance to gravity.

From between the hair, a deep blue pair of eyes glowed sharply like a jewellery.

"Ootori!"

Takeru called her name.

"Wh... you!"

One person tried to move the muzzle from Takeru to Ouka.

But she moved faster than that.

Using the recoil after landing she kicked off the man below him and leapt towards the man who was attempting to point the muzzle at her.

And using her left hand she pressed down enemy's handgun.

Barely touched, the enemy's gun had rolled on the ground.

Ouka did not stop. At the same time she neutralized the weapon of one person, using her comparatively high reaction speed she shoot another two. Anaesthesia bullets have hit the two targets in the chest and sent them to land of dreams.

Her movements were like a rapid stream. In a split second her elbow burst into the chin of the man who dropped a gun in surprise and she jumped inverting her body.

With flexibility like that of a leopard she had danced in the air, deliver a powerful jumping kick to another person's face.

Suddenly, the last remaining person who had lost all his comrades could only stand still, confused.

Helpless, he was swept off his feet by Ouka and fell on his back

Uwahh, he screamed. Feeling the pain in his back, in the last moment after he opened his eyes.

An unbelievable beautiful girl——had entered his field of vision.

Seeing the girl look down on him, the man was dazed. His absent-mindedness looked very similar to what Takeru had experienced in the death-match in middle school.

Too beautiful, too strong, he was unable to speak up.

As he felt such trivial impression, the muzzle was pressed against his belly and hit by anaesthesia bullet from zero distance, regrettably he lost his consciousness.

All of it happened in a blink of an eye.

Ouka stood up with a cool expression and swept her hair aside.

——However, it wasn't over yet.

Number one presence that couldn't be ignored. A huge shadow behind Ouka.

"Behind you!"

Takeru shouted instinctively.

It should have been unmanned, but the man holding "Trackless Psalms" and muttering something had boarded it in the middle of commotion.

The Dragoon swung its huge arm. Ouka remained turned in Takeru's direction, the cool expression still on her face.

"——Get down. Don't interfere."

So she told Takeru.

The next moment, just when he saw her lower her waist, Ouka has disappeared.

Cutting through the air, a huge fist broke the office's floor.

《"Damn, I missed?!"》

An upset voice had come from inside the Dragoon's armour. Ouka jumped very low, rolled on the ground and then took a posture on her knee, she changed her ammunition loading a magazine with live bullet instead of anaesthesia ones.

The Dragoon pulled its fist backwards, attempting to capture her.

Ouka moved faster than the Dragoon and lightly, she fired three shots towards enemy's right arm's joint. Of course, even with live ammunition it hadn't enough power to damage it.

《"I won't let myself get caught in a place like thiiiiissssss."》

Along with a frightened cry, the minigun's barrel attached to the Dragoon's left arm let out an eerie sound of rotation.

"Oh shit!"

Takeru instantly lied down on the ground, protecting his head.

Ouka kicked off the floor and at the same time as she had begun to run through the office, from the rotating barrel bullets have scattered with a momentum of a storm.

A loud sound of gunfire and breaking. The minigun not only destroyed the desks and chairs, but also marked the wall with holes in the trajectory following Ouka.

Ouka ran through along the wall of the office and even though it could be said that powerful impact was grazing her, she had calmly pulled the trigger aiming the muzzle at the Dragoon's right arm.

As pieces of wood scattered and dust rose up, the girl was sprinting in front of the bullet inferno. As she ran her bright hair trailing behind her had shone radiantly as if fluttered behind her. Ouka had curved when she reached the office room's corner and kicking off the floor, she jumped towards the Dragoon this time.

She slid, the bullets flew over her head almost reaching her as she passed through.

After sliding on the ground Ouka had crawled right under the Dragon.

It was very large, once one moved closer to the Dragoon, the minigun was nothing to be afraid of any longer. However, in close combat the Dragoon's knuckle was waiting.

The huge right fist was swung up. Ouka, remained on the floor looking upwards.

Thinking that it would crush her at this rate, Takeru reflexively was about to trigger the "Soumatou", that's when.

——**creak*....*creak* *creak*...!*

From the Dragoon's right arm, squeaky sounds could be heard.

The raised arm did not lower, it has stopped in the air. It only let out creaking and did not budge.

《"Wh-why?!!"》

The man piloting it screamed.

Takeru concentrated, looking at the dragoon's right arm.

In a small gap between the joints, three bullets have bit into the worm gear's mechanism.

With them inside, it was impossible for it to move. There was no other way but to manually remove them during maintenance.

"The drawback of the old-style Dragoons is it's joint drive's exposure and vulnerability. Also, it's not one made for close combat."

《"E-even so... it's not something you can stop with a handgun, right?!""》

What the man said was reasonable.

God-like marksmanship. The gap was merely 3 centimetres big. It was possible for a normal human to hit there. Even if the low-powered gun had good accuracy, there was a limit. And above all, pulling off something like that in the middle of tense combat was not normal.

《"Dammit, Move! Come on, move!"》

Although the operator swayed the Dragoon's body, the swung up arm remained there, cutting through the air.

At that time, the pilot had already lost the sight of Ouka.

Where? Before he could think that,

**bam*...* the pilot felt a slight vibration and something on the back.

"............"

On the Dragoon's back as it was in a kneeling position, on top of the armour stood the powerful girl with hair that had colour of sunset.

Her cold gaze and her gun's muzzle were both aimed at the bottom of the Dragoon's neck, where it was equipped with an exhaust port.

《"Mo-monst——"》

Monster. The moment he tried to say that.

Pressing the gun's muzzle against the exhaust's small opening, Ouka squeezed the trigger.

《"GUAAAHHHHHHHHHH."》

A scream had come from inside the Dragoon and it's huge body swayed attempting to shake her off, but Ouka firmly held onto the Dragoon's head and wasn't thrown off. Even as her body and hair were shaken vigorously, she continued to fire bullets towards the interior through the exhaust port until ammunition had ran out.

The bullets that had entered the exhaust port have ricocheted inside violently, breaking the instruments and piercing through the pilot's body.

When she exhausted everything by firing, the Dragoon finally stopped and smoke had raised from inside.

The cockpit's hatch opened, spilling smoke violently.

"...gehh...ghh...gho..."

The pilot showed himself. His shoulder and leg were shot by one bullet each and his flesh was torn off.

She really defeated it, a Dragoon, using just her own body.

Ouka had eliminated an opponent that normally would require an anti-tank weapon to beat, using a handgun that was a sub-weapon. He wondered whether there was a precedent of such thing.

He already knew it but,

Even though he knew it from the start,

...she's on a way different level.

As Takeru was speechless, elsewhere the pilot breathed faintly and was pointed a gun's muzzle at by Ouka who put a leg in the cockpit.

"...that's how it ends up when an amateur uses a Dragoon, did you learn something?"

"...sd...damn it...eh."

"It might be outdated scrap, but it's against the law to operate a Dragoon without a permit. In case the operator is hostile, we're allowed to shoot to kill the pilot."

"He...hehehe...do it...I dare you, y...you can't do it anyway."

"............"

"You bastards won't shoot people who don't resist. I know that well."

As the man talked back to her in an insulting manner, Ouka fell silent. In response to which the man got even more full of himself.

"See. You ain't shootin'."

"............"

"Even if I kill a kid in of ya bastards, you just continue to stare like th——"

——Momentarily.

Gunfire resounded

"Gaaaaaaaaaaahhhh, ahh! It hrdss! It hurddssssst!"

The man held his left leg that should have been intact.

Takeru was stunned, unable to move but he immediately noticed Ouka had pulled the trigger.

"H-hey!"

Takeru tried to rush over, but his legs immediately stopped

With her cobalt-blue eyes wide open Ouka looked down at the man as he suffered.

In her pupils, there was something very, very dangerous.

"Zo-sorry! F-forgive me, don't shoot me any more! I'll give this back! Take it back!"

The man took out "Trackless Psalms" from his pocket and offered it weakly.

Ouka saw it and her expression slowly darkened, becoming steeper.

"You're the one who told me to try it."

"...gha...that wa..."

"I thought you wanted to get killed, was I wrong? That's really convenient. It's a great help."

"I-it was a joke! A joke I tell you...I apologize, s-save me!"

As the man howled miserably in front of her, Ouka narrowed her eyes sharply. What resounded in the office were just the man's screams and crying.

Meanwhile, Ouka's mouth trembled.

Takeru had certainly heard a quiet, bell-like voice.

"Trash... garbage... despite having a great strength they won't use it righteously. Whether you bastards have power or not you hurt others for your own profit... it makes me sick."

He felt clear hatred and cold murderous intent. Takeru didn't know what had angered her to such an extent.

Takeru intuitively understood that the anger coming from deep inside her and overtook her hadn't come from something ordinary.

It could be called a foreboding.

The suddenly-springing up murderous intent caused Takeru to recall faint dread.

"...I'll exterminate you. You bastards, witches too... everything...!"

Ouka moved the gun's muzzle from the man's leg to his head, when she had set up the gun Takeru shouted.

"W-what the hell are you doing! That's enough isn't it?!"

"The opponent is armed with a reinforced exoskeleton. This treatment is legitimate, Captain."

"Armed with... ain't he powerless now!"

"I see. You're right. But what he's holding now is a Magical Heritage. Ohh... I found a reason to kill him."

"That's too far-fetched! He's holding it out to you! So, what reason you're gonna use now?!"

"Silence. It's already up to me. If I hadn't come you would have been defeated. Since you know that, just stand there and look."

"...wh..."

Ouka didn't accept the words of Takeru, the captain.

It clearly wasn't something a professional would do. Even inquisitors were allowed to shoot to kill under limited circumstances. If the opponent doesn't resist, it turns into a huge problem.

He clearly said she was in the wrong. It wasn't that Takeru wanted to cover for the man. In fact, Takeru didn't care what happens to that kind of scum.

Was this man to be killed, it would end up with a bad result for Ouka and the platoon. Right now, as the captain he had to stop it no matter what.

"Now... let's start the witch-hunt."

As if looking at a dying ant, Ouka's mouth distorted.

——*Make it in time!!*

Takeru triggered "Soumatou" in a split second. His body moved before he could make a decision in his head.

Feeling pressure with his entire body as if he was moving in the cement, he rushed in the slow-motion world.

"...wha,,,"

Ouka displayed astonishment. Takeru who was supposed to be behind her had imperceptibly appeared in front of her to protect the man and grasper her arm.

Holding Ouka's wrist, Takeru was about to admonish her with a serious look.

But,

"?!! Do——wahh!"

"——Khhh!"

Because "Soumatou's" momentum was too strong, his posture was disturbed, and he fell on the floor together with Ouka.

"Oww..."

He raised his body while rubbing his head, then opened his eyes.

....

And froze.

"______"

"............"

In a posture looking like he pushed her down, Takeru hung over Ouka. His hand that should have been on the floor felt an indescribable sensation. A water balloon? A marshmallow? A rubber ball? None of it seemed like it, it was a warm and soft bulge.

Just from feeling it, his heart rate had accelerated.

"______"

No words came out. All inside his head was a honest impression saying "pretty big".

There wasn't any change in Ouka's expression. Just, he could tell her face faintly reddened.

"I-it's okay."

Desperate, Takeru said so. He himself had no idea why was it okay, but he searched for the words that would allow him to survive through this situation.

"I'm"

"............"

"I'm——in small breasts faction!"

....

...*chakin*

"Sorry, I lied! That's not the problem! It's an excuse, I lost control, please forgive me!"

Having a muzzle put against his forehead, Takeru made a posture raising his both hands in surrender.

With a bright red face Ouka raised her body and ground the muzzle against him.

"...uUUUUuuU...Uuuuuuu..."

She growled in embarrassment. Although it would be rude to say it was unexpected, but she was unexpectedly maidenly. Since all he had seen of her was how she fought back in the middle school, he was under the impression that she was a female terminator. He was sure that she would either coldly slap him or just say "could you move?" in response.

Her eyes have become watery. She has cute parts too, he ended up thinking.

And that he'd be shot. He'll definitely be shot.

"Wait! Calm down Ootori!"

"Hurry up——and get off meeeeeee!!"

She put strength in pulling the trigger. Takeru prepared himself to die.

Next moment.

Even though he should have been shot through forehead, for some reason pain had come from the back of his head.

"Eh, wha...〜〜a?"

Takeru tried to take a look back, but failed.

Strength left his body, just like that his face was buried in Ouka's chest with a **boing**. Although it seemed like his head was being beaten and turned into a total mess, he could no longer feel the pain.

《"Th-this time, I-I to-took them out? I took them out haven't I?! Y-yay! I did it!!"》

A joyful voice had come from the intercom. As his consciousness turned ambiguous, Takeru understood.

The one who shot him wasn't Ouka, but Usagi. Surely she had no grasp on what was happening and in a rush she had erroneously mistaken Takeru for the enemy. The fact it was an anaesthesia bullet was a blessing in disguise.

This was the result of failing to report the situation.

"In the end...it ends up...like this...huh."

You reap what you sow, before he could say that Takeru had lost consciousness.

"Good grieff..!"

Ouka roughly pushed Takeru away, who had fainted in her chest with a happy expression. Throwing the noisy intercom she had on her ear, then raised her sunset hair in annoyance.

"Small fries, small fries... is what I heard, but I didn't expect it to be this bad."

With appalled expression she put her hand on her forehead.

After rolling down to the floor, Takeru seemed to have a nightmare about being chased by debt collectors. Ouka had furrowed her eyebrows in anger.

This time's mission would probably, definitely fail if not for Ouka being here. With just thugs as their opponents 35th platoon would probably somehow manage, but it was a different story with the Dragoon in it.

It had clearly exceeded the student level. If not for Ouka, they would have been wiped out.

Strange...

Ouka squinted as she looked at the broken Dragoon.

"These guys shouldn't have something like a Dragoon. It's strange to bring it out for a Magical Heritage on the level of "Trackless Psalms"... in that case there was something else..."

There was something happening behind the scenes.

The moment Ouka though that,

"Mmm, mm, I'm s-sorry, next week for sure... I'll pay for suree... ahh, stop, don't destroy the furniture. Mm, mmm...."

"..........."

Her thoughts were hindered by the sleep talk coming from the side, Ouka's cheek twitched.

"Of all things this is the captain..."

She heaved a sigh.

"Haa, why is the chairman considering giving a Relic Eater to a bunch like this?"

Ouka muttered to herself with a tired expression, her pupils displaying disappointment were directed to Takeru.

She stared in a daze at Takeru's appearance as he made a unhappy expression.

Can't do anything but close quarters combat, spineless, his leadership is bad.. there's nothing good about him. As a bonus, his defect is that he easily snaps.

The more she looked at him, the more disappointed she was.

But... as my impulses have taken over, this man's the first one to come to stop me.

Even though she gave him one point more in evaluation for it, she didn't feel any gratitude.

Ouka was aware of her own shortcomings. This critical tendency was just an obstacle in the way of her goal.

The single point of them both snapping easily was where she and Takeru might have resembled each other.

When she thought so, an ironic smile had appeared on Ouka's face.

"............"

As she looked at sleeping Takeru's expression, Ouka felt an illusion as if her shoulders have become a little lighter.

What had emerged in her heart was a slight hope.

The loneliness in her heart had slightly faded away.

That's why Ouka dared to,

——She dared to,

"...after all this time."

She discarded her expectations and moved her line of sight away from Takeru, looked at the night sky outside the window.

The sky had was lit up by the city's neon lights and not a single star could be seen.

* * *

On the roof of a distant building.

From there, an azure girl has seen it all.

Above the water tank, her legs were in mid-air and unmoving, her hair fluttered in the wind.

The girl alone, stood in the night sky.

"…Kusanagi...Takeru..."

The hair of the girl who spoke his name floated, disobeying gravity.

Like sand that raised from the ground and reflected moonlight,

Surrounding the girl, dancing like fireflies were glittering azure particles.

Chapter 3 - The Clumsy Ones

150 years ago. A single witch had caused a large-scale Akashic Hazard because of which majority of human race was killed. The aftermath of the Akashic Hazard was still ongoing and the non-habitable contaminated area called Sanctuary had spread around the entire world.

The only salvation was that the Sanctuary no longer expanded. Currently, after 150 years humanity was able to restore itself thanks to that.

"............I hate...this city..."

While looking at the neon lights shining vividly, a girl holding a convenience store bag muttered to herself.

On her semi-long hair she had a casket hat. Her height was slightly below average. She wore a woman's jacket, a racy miniskirt and long boots. For some reason, even though it was still autumn, she had a scarf wrapped around her neck.

The girl quickly ran up the stairs of a apartment built around 20 years ago and stopped in front of the doors of the middle room.

She took a key out of her pocket and casually opened the door. Then she took off her shoes with a kicking movement and walked directly to the living room. It was a simple room with nothing but a table and refrigerator in it.

Without switching the lights on the girl had left the convenience store bag on the table and glared at the sliding door in the back.

"...it smells, Haunted."

She called out towards the sliding door and displeased, sat down in the chair.

When she did,

"——Oh? You have come back. I haven't noticed at all."

A man's voice had come from the other side of the sliding door.

The girl remained sitting for a while, after which the sliding door had opened and a single man had appeared.

The man was dressed in a very strange manner.

A butcher's apron used when dismantling meat, a mask and rubber gloves of a surgeon, in his right hand he held a machete and a sawtooth in his left hand. Most likely, the clothing that used to be pure white when first equipped, was now stained with dark red blood.

Clearly uncomfortable, the girl had clicked her tongue.

"...you..."

"Ooh, forgive me for appearing like this. The materials went on a little rampage. Ha ha ha, I'll change now so don't make that face."

"...I don't really mind... I've no intention to stay for long."

The man went "oh", then blinking slightly disappointed, he tossed the mask on his mouth in the trash.

His face was uncovered. He narrowed his eyes, with a big smile and a refreshing expression facing towards the girl. The man's bloodied body was truly mismatched with his good young man's face.

The girl glared at him genuinely disgusted.

He responded to the hostility with just a smile.

"You're quite late aren't you. I was really worried that you might have failed."

"I'm already being marked, how about you understand that."

"That happens. Aww, you have been cooperating with us for a year now... have you gotten used to it yet?"

"...I'm not cooperating with you cause I like it."

"So you haven't, after all. So it's too bloody even for Senpai's daughter."

The girl once again made an uncomfortable expression and clicked her tongue in response to what the man said.

The man, satisfied after seeing the girl's face distort in chagrin, looked towards the table.

"Has it gone without a hitch?"

"I have properly acquired the fragments."

"I have heard that the school's test platoon had intruded on you, were you all right?"

"......!! Where did you get that info?"

"Whaat, it's not just you who's cooperating with us."

"Disgusting... no problem. My face wasn't seen and no traces of the cult were left. I was being vigilant but..."

"That is most important. It's all right, other members are causing more noticeable incidents. Also, this is too high level to keep secret with just vigilance. Current Inquisition is blinded by peace."

The man said so and glanced at the plastic bag on the table.

"...oh, it seems like you bought me a boxed launch. Sorry for being a bother. Thank you very much."

He said his thanks, grateful from the bottom of his heart and after removing the apron and gloves, he started to greedily devour the lunch on spot.

Very happily he ate the lunch from convenience store.

"Drop the act, you've specifically asked me to buy it..."

"Aww, I'm really fond of this convenience store's lunch, these preservatives and colouring agents are wonderful, truly a taste I'm well acquainted with."

Mmm, he took a deep breath, enjoying the after-taste.

At this sight, the girl's expression had turned very steep.

"Rather than that, what's up with these fragments. What are you going to do with it?"

As the girl asked, the man immersed in eating his lunch had stopped his chopsticks.

He extended them forward until he swallowed what he had in his mouth.

"**ngulp**... this?"

"Yeah. From what I've seen it has no magical power in it and barely any operative procedures remain inside. It's just scrap metal that can't even be used as a converter."

When the girl said that, the man had smiled very happily.

"Kufu, you don't know? It's something that a great legendary person had been using, pieces of a Magical Heritage. You should know him... the boss of those monsters surrounding the table."

"So what, It's worthless debris. A Magical Heritage loses it's value once broken, doesn't it."

"No such thing. I'm a necromancer, an alchemist and a summoner... aren't I? 《Eienherjar》 needs a weapon to fight doesn't he? That's what this fragments are for."

"............you really intend to summon such a thing?"

Seeing the girl anxious, the man made a smile.

After placing the lunch box on the desk, he wiped his mouth with a towel.

"Thanks to your bringing in these fragments we've aligned enough forces. The guy I finished off there was the last one. The custom of cremating people after death is very strong in Japan. The sympathizers have had a hard time collecting the materials. These were mainly procured locally."

"...how many people did you kill for this operation?"

"Around fifty. Don't worry, half of them were just criminals. Of course, we've borrowed as many as possible from the morgue, but as I thought fresh muscles are necessary. To make them move properly it's..."

While the man spoke with a smile and eyes looking like that of a dead fish, the girl turned a gaze full of murderous intent at him.

He only noticed her murderous intent only when he finished talking.

"Oh? What happened? That's a scary expression."

"...if not for consequences, I'd kill you here and now."

It wasn't a lie nor a joke, in a low voice she spat out what she really felt.

Hearing that, the man narrowed his eyes with satisfaction.

"Even if you want to you won't kill me, right? What kind of fate awaits if you kill me... you know that, don't you?"

"..........."

"Wouldn't that be troublesome? O' daughter of a great witch, Nikaido Mari-san,"

The man spoke the girl's name.

A moment later, he could hear the girl grind her teeth.

"Drop the pointless talk...! Know your place, damn necromancer...!!"

When the girl called Mari tried to grasp the man, something had wriggled by the sliding door in the back.

The girl stopped moving and clenched her teeth.

Pairs of eerily glittering eyes had appeared from the darkness one after another.

Something was there. There was a large amount of something that wasn't alive behind the sliding door.

"It's all right. In the event of the VIP rescue being successful, I intend to accept your request. But if it fails... I'll have you lend me a hand providing information again."

The girl couldn't tell whether he was lying or not.

However, there was a reason because of which she was absolutely unable to go against him.

"The operation shall be carried out openly."

"............make sure to keep your promise."

"Don't involve civilians... was it. No need to worry. Ours, Valhalla's enemy is Inquisition alone. Sacrificing the innocent civilians is against our guidelines."

"............"

"We will surely win and eliminate the discrimination and prejudice against the witches. We have battle maidens and heroes on our side. Inquisition's dictatorship won't last much longer."

When the man finished saying that, he gentlemanly placed one hand on his chest and outstretching his left hand he bowed.

"Well then——your blessing, battle maiden."

After the girl left, the man, necromancer Haunted had sat down in the chair and greedily devoured the lunch.

The room had a strong odour filling it, an ordinary human would end up vomiting because of how bloody it was.

However, Haunted nonchalantly ate the lunch in such a situation.

He rest his body weight on the backrest and sipped tea from the cup.

And when he let out a deep breath,

"——Haunted's such a liar."

From the darkness behind the sliding screen sounded voice like a bell.

Moving just his head, Haunted smiled towards the darkness.

"Were you listening? Nacht."

"With that much noise I'll hear it even if I don't want to. I'm in a really bad mood after my sleep was disturbed."

It was a drowsy voice. Judging by the voice itself, it was clear it had belonged to a girl.

Haunted played around with the teacup in his hand as if it was a glass of wine.

"So? Just why am I a liar?"

"What you just told Mari earlier. About responding to her request after it's over, or about not involving civilians."

"Aah... that."

Ku ku ku, Haunted's mouth distorted and he let out a laughter.

"Indeedly, it was a lie. ...do you know why I lied? Nacht."

Being asked, she responded after a short pause.

"...................................somewhat."

"So you don't know, I'll tell you then."

"No, I somewhat kno——"

"The reason why I lied to her... you see."

"............"

This guy wants to say it... feeling that, the owner of the voice fell silent.

The next moment Haunted opened his eyes wide,

"——See, it's cause I want to see Mari-chan's frustrated face!"

A bizarre and ecstatic expression of his had burst out.

"That girl's so cute. She grew up persecuted in many ways, so she acts strong but in fact her heart is very feeble. Ahh, I can't bear it. You ought to have such a girl taste shame and humiliation, right? Not physically, but mentally."

"......yup, I thought it was something like that. What a pervert you are."

"You think so too, Nacht?"

"No, I find it difficult to agree."

"You too want to see that girl bit her lower lip in chagrin, right? You want to see her, glaring in my direction with tears in her eyes and bright red face, don't you?"

"No... I said..."

"I see I see I see, so you do, don't you."

...it was pointless to say anything.

"One day I'll tell her... 'you won't ever escape from Valhalla.' AHAHAHAHAHA."

Knowing that Haunted won't stop once he talks like that, the owner of the voice sighed half-resigned.

The voice's owner was full of anxiety on the future.

She still couldn't get it.

This pervert gentleman in front of her who spoke about a very special type of moe was one of the upper echelons of "Valhalla", the only magical association capable of competing with Inquisition. She was still unable to believe the reality she'd rather pretend not to see.

"AHAHAHA-HA——GEHOGEHH!! Gufu-khyu, fuhihihihi!"

"............"

A necromancer, alchemist, summoner and to top it off a former priest of the church, a blasphemous human. Valhalla's Haunted.

There was almost no one in the Valhalla who knew his age, real name and upbringing.

"............makes me uneasy."

The existence Haunted had called Nacht.

An S-ranked Magical Heritage, the magical sword "Dáinsleif" felt a physiological discomfort as she watched her owner and muttered.

* * *

One week had passed since the operation's success and the 35th platoon's results have dramatically changed for the better. Since securing "Trackless Psalms" they had already seized three D-ranked Magical Heritage. The rumour of the famous Small Fry Platoon getting so many achievements had already reached the members of the other platoons.

With that said, the one being evaluated wasn't the 35th platoon as a whole but Ootori Ouka alone.

The other members were thought of as even more miserable than before.

As Ouka walked down the corridor in which first years' classrooms were lined up, the students' gazes were glued to her.

"Hey look, isn't it that person, the one who joined Small Fry Platoon as part of their special treatment."

"Why is the ex-Dullahan not speaking at all? It's the first time I've seen a real Dullahan."

"All alone she seized three D-rank's, hasn't she? Amazing... as I thought, Dullahans are awesome."

"She's a beauty, has nice style and is strong on top of that. I admire her."

"But why did she have to enter the Small Fry Platoon I wonder. If she came to ours, it would be easy to reach promotion the quota."

"The rumour is that the Small Fry Platoon was so bad, the chairman called a pro to help them out. Inequality, eh?"

"Isn't it, it's a waste of talent to put her with that bunch. Look at that dull bunch, especially the captain! Look at his evil eyes and that sword hanging at his waist! He's absolutely no good!"

"That person, doesn't he have absolutely bad grades outside platoon activities? Seriously."

Behind Ouka walking briskly. Seeing the 35th platoon's trio, the students looked at them enviously and with contempt.

Originally they were used to being quietly laughed at, but it was first time envy was directed at them. It was granted that a completely no-good platoon receiving help from a top-notch helper would be receiving a lot of complaints from other students.

In even worse manner than usual, the platoon members other than Ouka trudged down the hallway.

After the morning classes had ended, Usagi hit the work desk in the platoon's room with both hands as hard as she could.

"What is the meanings of this, how about you explain?! Ootori Ouka!"

Questioned, Ouka who was performing a maintenance of her weapon had tilted her head with a cool expression.

"About what?"

"Your attitude day after day! Are you making fools out of us?!"

"I had no such intention, if I did something rude, I apologize. Sorry."

Seeing Ouka's honest attitude, "kiiiiiiiiihhh" Usagi had further raised a loud scream.

"Do not apologize! I'm telling you to explain!"

"I said, about what?"

"Why aren't you letting us participate in the investigation?! Always act selfishly and bring back Magical Heritages on your own! We're completely losing our face here!"

"Isn't that fine. You can get the points you wanted but couldn't get without doing anything. What are you dissatisfied about?"

"We do not want a automatic point-making machine! Do you even know how miserable do we feel because of your one-man play?!"

"If you guys want to work, do it by yourselves. I'm fine alone."

Ouka has been like that the entire time since the "Trackless Psalms" incident.

It was no wonder Usagi was angry. Even Takeru still wasn't convinced by it, but "how about it?" he wondered.

Usagi's face was so red it seemed like steam would come out from her head, it seemed like she would grasp Ouka's collar at any moment.

"Such an insult... it is the first time since I was born...!! Who do you think you are?!"

Takeru stopped Usagi who was about to rush at her. He tried to appease the unruly horse by rubbing her back.

"Quit it. Whatever you say to this woman is a waste. She's interested only in her own goals."

Ikaruga, who for some reason was indulged in reading an erotic magazine on top of the maintenance desk said to Usagi.

In response to these words Ouka quietly sighed.

"I'll say this, this is the best way for you 35th platoon to go about."

"Hee, the best way for us? Let's hear it. Just how did you think to come up with such conclusion."

Ikaruga put the book down, crossed her arms and smiling fearlessly inquired.

Ouka had,

"...in that case I'll state this clearly."

Said so, put her favourite gun down and stood up.

All the members have raised their faces.

The gazes had gathered on Ouka and the room had become dead silent.

Ouka had indifferently spat out the following words.

"Your best choice is to do nothing."

Ikaruga squinted, Usagi stood up wanting to say something. And as a expected, even Takeru frowned.

"What... do you mean?"

Usagi asked.

"I mean you should not dispatch. Simply put, with your abilities if you involve yourself with organizations and cults dealing with Magical Heritages, you will very likely die."

"Wha... what a thing to say."

"If I'm alone the success rate and survival rate is higher."

"...whattttttt?!"

"First, Saionji. There's a fatal flaw to your sniping. A sniper often becomes a cornerstone of a mission. The vanguard believes in your cover as it acts in hostile territory. And yet, because of your catastrophic stage fright you shoot in a completely wrong direction and ended up accidentally taking down an ally. I don't want to leave my back to such a person. If possible, I don't want you to hold a rifle ever again."

"Gu...nghh."

Tears have appeared in chagrined Usagi's eyes.

Next, Ouka looked at Ikaruga.

"Suginami, you too. I acknowledge your maintenance skills. It's amazing as usual. However, you're remodelling too much. Don't go modifying my favourite gun arbitrarily. Don't add full auto in it. Don't go making it possible to fire powerful ammunition. They're clearly illegal modifications."

...so she did that.

Takeru didn't use guns so he didn't know that, but he was still amazed.

"The powerful ammo isn't a problem right? I've properly made it strong enough that it doesn't decompose from the recoil."

"Instead of making it so it doesn't decompose try mitigating the recoil. And what kind of excuse do you have for making full auto?"

"It can fire a barrage?"

"The magazine only holds nine rounds. Test platoons aren't allowed to use anything other than the goods from the Alchemist Corporation. The parts used in the modification were clearly ordered from the outside. "

"It's compensation for romance. You can tolerate that much——"

Ikaruga's romance was pretty twisted, she had pouted with a "boo". Ouka decided it's no use to say anything else, she pulled the chair back and soundlessly stood up.

Then she moved towards Takeru, who was standing right next to a greatly shaken up Usagi, and she looked directly at him.

"For the last... Kusanagi."

She pointed out the faults of the other two emotionlessly, with just Takeru alone it was different.

Takeru on top of the chair had stretched his back and soundly swallowed saliva. It was because disgust was clearly visible on Ouka's face.

"You shouldn't continue to be the captain. What I just told those two, should have come out of your mouth instead. Do you want your team members to die?"

She was right. He really had no way to respond.

Takeru too was aware of that point. But could he act bossy towards his subordinates despite his own lack of skill? He always ended being nervous about that, he felt very miserable.

"Or maybe you don't want to act bossy because you are no better?"

He was seen through completely.

"...that's what disqualifies you from being a captain."

A smile of contempt and harsh words.

He had nothing to say in response. Someone like him who couldn't do even that, didn't have the mental attitude to become captain from the start.

It wasn't self-depreciation, that's what Takeru thought about the current situation.

"............that's true, maybe."

When Takeru said that, having his usual stomach pain,

For some reason, Ouka's hair stood up on its ends and she opened her eyes wide.

Her expression had become even more steep.

"You're not qualified to become an inquisitor...!"

Revealing her fury, Ouka closed on Takeru and strongly grasped his jacket.

Unable to react to her sudden action, he was pulled to her without doing anything.

"...Ootori."

"I've heard from Chairman about your motivation. It seems like you're aiming for the job for money, aren't you...you snob...have some shame! "

"......!!"

"Don't think you can judge evil out of your selfish interests... how about you realize Inquisition is rotting because of bastards like you!"

Takeru fell silent.

Momentarily, his vision was stained red and it seemed like he would return to his old self.

You have no right to say that to me.

What do you know about me?

What do you know——about *us?!*

"............"

He felt like saying that, but put up with it.

Looking at the surface alone, it couldn't be helped it'll be taken in this way. Ouka knew nothing about Takeru. Conversely, Takeru knew nothing about Ouka either.

That's why he endured it. Endured and swallowed it.

"You've aligned quite a few opinions there, but do you have the right to say that?"

That's when Ikaruga, sitting in the chair said so.

"...what?"

"Since you're saying Kusanagi isn't qualified, how about you? In the first place, Ootori, haven't you come back to the academy because your inquisitor's qualifications were stripped of you?"

Quietly, indifferently, Ikaruga accused Ouka.

Being told that by Ikaruga, Ouka fell silent and faced downwards.

"I know all about it. What inquisitors call you amongst each other.

"......!!"

" 《Calamity》 . Killing criminals on your own accord even when not ordered to, like a plague turning every scene into a sea of blood, they say. That's not an opinion someone from the top would end up with."

"...you... investigated me without permission."

"That's not something you can accuse others of, can you. I just imitated you exploring Kusanagi's motives."

"That...Chairman has...!!"

Ouka spoke, then swallowed her words. Her strongly clenched fist had made a loud sound.

"............"

In the end she did not refute Ikaruga. She just quietly closed her eyes and turned around on her heel.

"As for myself, I have no intention of denying. But I didn't lie about the platoon's activities nor have any intention to withdraw it. As it is Kusanagi is clearly disqualified from being the captain.."

Ouka switched her feelings, turning back to normal.

Turning her back towards them, she walked to the exit.

"Same for the others. My prediction that you all will die is correct. I'll pass on falling down together with you."

" " "............" " "

"That's all I wanted to say."

Leaving those words behind, Ouka left the room.

......the room fell silent and an awkward atmosphere had filled it.

"...that damn super meritocrat. Does she believe in nothing but herself?"

"Well, what she pointed out was roughly correct."

"About that, it seemed like she was extra thorny when it came to you Kusanagi. Did you do anything to her?"

The event from a week ago had passed through Takeru's head.

Recalling the softness filling his hand, he blushed.

Ikaruga stared at Takeru's face intently, then put a mint-flavoured candy that was lying on the work desk into her mouth and looked up at the rooms ceiling.

"...this perverted brat."

"?!"

He looked at Ikaruga with a startled expression. Could it be, since the wireless' switch was on that she heard everything that happened in there, he wondered.

Takeru's shoulders slumped.

"Her reaction against criminals and witches is clearly abnormal from what I heard. She clearly holds hatred for them."

"So you really did investigate her... so you were looking for a way to get along with her as well, huh."

"No, I thought of looking for her weaknesses."

"...right."

Takeru instantly reproached himself for looking at Ikaruga in a different light.

"But it didn't take long. Her 《Calamity》 nickname is quite famous. Her number of arrested criminals and confiscated Magical Heritages is a big deal, but to a surprising extent there's a huge number of people shot dead."

"............"

"Probably, it's about something that happened in the past I guess."

Not interested in it though, she added and sucked on a mint chupa-chups.

A huge number of people shot dead. Takeru too, happened to know something of it. In the "Trackless Psalms" incident the other day he had become aware of Ouka's dangerousness.

『"...I'll exterminate you. You bastards, witches too... everything...!"』

Certainly, hatred did dwell in these words.

Honestly, since she was a comrade from the same platoon it would be a lie to say he wasn't worried.

"That fellow, she was always alone. Because of her creepy behaviour no one wanted to work with her, even when they invited her privately to join her, she always responded with NO . There was some reason... or maybe her personality is just bankrupt. Anyway, what's certain that her personality is poor."

" "..........." "

"? Why are you two looking at me?"

" "You're not one to talk!" "

As the two spoke in unison, whaat, Ikaruga added and pouted with a mint candy in her mouth.

Since the atmosphere calmed down quite a bit, Usagi who was being timid during the quarrel with Ouka——she was vulnerable to unexpected fights——had outstretched her back arrogantly and had entered the conversation.

"Good grief, that woman is just dishonest! Why can she not do it better?!"

"...? What's that about, Usagi?"

"It is about Ootori Ouka. There is a limit to being clumsy. She should say what she feels more honestly."

"Hmm... you know something about her?"

How about you tell us, he asked Usagi beside her.

Usagi snorte and puffed her chest grandly.

"Of course I do. I am a model maiden after all."

"Haa."

"It's simple. Listen, okay? That woman has no friends and can't help wanting to join us, but since she's clumsy and cannot do it she got obsessed with you who is the captain 'I am superior to you so let me be your comrade', exuding a roundabout aura like that to make you invite her! She acts strong but just can't be honest, that is definitely it. That woman has absolutely no friends you see."

"It rather looked to me like she bluntly refused that."

"Therefore——Ootori Ouka is definitely lonesome!"

"Fufufun", how about it? Making an expression saying just that, Usagi puffed her chest proudly.

Coincidentally, at this time Takeru and Ikaruga had the same impression.

" "Isn't that about you?" "

And the two voiced their impression.

"Whaa?! Are you saying I seem lonely?!"

"You didn't have a single acquaintance in middle school, left out and lonely, it was written on your face."

"I-I w-wasn't really... lonely or anything!"

"But that matches the fact you haven't had a single friend.."

"Nguhhhh."

"I wonder if bunnies really die when they're lonely～?"

"Nguhhaaa Suginami Ikarugaaa!!"

Steaming, Usagi had lunged at Ikaruga, but was held by the head at a distance she was unable to reach.

In the noisy platoon room Takeru wondered what to do next.

What Ouka said was correct. If she works all alone, she'll earn points.

However, that would make the platoon lose its meaning. It could be said that it was a wrong choice as the captain.

To act like a captain... what Ootori said was reasonable, I need to think seriously about the platoon's future.

Involuntarily, he made a wry smile.

...to be somehow acknowledged as the comrade from the same platoon, huh.

Helping each other, if they could cooperate it would lead to overall improvement of their abilities. Previously, they were unable to cooperate. But since they had Ouka in their platoon, her abilities alone were added.

Like this, even without cooperating, just by interacting together with her they could surely produce a good result.

Above all...

"...to make her our comrade. At this rate, it'll turn real bad."

Takeru muttered to himself, then stood up from the chair.

He quietly put both his hands on the work table and closed his eyes.

After coming this far, I can finally use the knowledge I got from the books I read, it won't go to waste. Takeru roused himself in his mind.

"——I have a proposal."

When Takeru opened his eyes, in his expression dwelled self-confidence and sense of mission.

A few minutes later. The three had clung to the wall by the cafeteria's entrance and peeked inside.

They looked inside with a scope, observing something intently. From the rear they looked like perverts. The students passing by whispered to each other commenting on it.

The three had ignored their gazes and monitored the appearance of their target, Ootori Ouka.

"...target acquired."

"...as expected, she's eating alone."

"The lunch menu? What's her lunch menu?"

Ouka was sitting alone in the seat by the window, her expression was a grumpy one.

And placed on top of the table was...

"...anpan and milk... Why anpan and milk?!"

"Anpan and milk... that fellow is just like Kusanagi."

"What! Don't make fun of anpan and milk! It's super tasty! It costs only 160 yen including milk! It's tasty and easy on the wallet; the strongest combination!"

" "You're too loud!" "

"...........sorry."

Takeru who couldn't stay silent because of his extraordinary obsession on the point of anpan and milk combo had lowered his head, protesting.

They continued to observe Ouka.

She had opened the milk bottle's lid, took out the anpan from the bag and stopped moving. Then suddenly, she looked around restlessly at full alert.

The three hid in a hurry.

"Why is she so vigilant during a meal?"

"...there's something for sure."

"T-there is something special about anpan and milk...?"

They waited until she lowered her guard before appearing again. Even though she was just eating a meal, why was she being so tense.

The three of loudly swallowed saliva as Ouka finally brought anpan to her mouth.

And then... **mofunn**

"She's eating." "She is eating." "Eating."

She was just eating an anpan, but the three's hands started sweating. Their strange gestures had attracted gaze from surroundings.

Continuing, Ouka reached out for the milk bottle and drank a mouthful of it.

A moment later

"......～～～～♪"

Ouka's grumpy expression melted like ice.

" " "............" " "

Seeing a very cute expression she made that didn't match her, the three were at a loss for words. It looked like the expression one makes right after entering a hot spring, a genuinely relaxed look on one's face.

"............"

Moreover, it was just for an instant. Her expression returned to the original one, holding the anpan strongly.

"～～～～♪ *(*mofu mofu*)."

Again, it had broke off, then turned gloomy. When they looked closely, they noticed she was faintly flailing her legs as she carried anpan to her mouth.

The three haven't seen a scene like this before, where someone's expression could change so much.

"...it's her big favourite, that one."

"S...she is so clumsy, she does not hide her joy at all."

"She... might be unexpectedly normal."

Takeru and Usagi were too shocked by the difference from her everyday self to comment. Ikaruga was grinning like crazy and repeatedly took pictures with the camera.

"Ufu, ufufufufu, I-I can use this! I can use this in many ways against that prideful woman. W-ww-with this weakness here, what k-k-k-kk-kind of c-cosplay should I make her wear."

"Hey, what are you taking pictures for? Come on, we're going back!"

"A-anpanman after all?! A heroine whose only friends are her gun and courage?! Who do I pick?! What if there are problems with copyright, what do I do Kusanagi?!"

"Don't go berserk here, let's go already!"

Grasping Ikaruga by her neck as she panted heavily, the three had ran away from the spot in a hurry.

...........an hour and a half later.

"...certainly, I've accepted your proposal, and won't pull out of it but.. couldn't it be more like... wasn't there something else?"

Ikaruga who held scissors and origami in her hands spoke with displeasure by the platoon's work desk.

Even though she complained, her hands didn't rest. Folding origami four-fold, she soundly cut it along the line. The monotonous work during which she connected the ring-shaped pieces with glue to form a chain had continued for roughly an hour already.

The decorations Ikaruga made were hung all over the platoon room. A white curtain was hung from the ceiling and on it "Small Fry Platoon☆ New Member Welcome Party" was written with shabby handwriting.

It was the pinnacle of masochism to label themselves the Small Fry Platoon on their own.

"Yeah! with this Ootori should open her heart to us a bit!"

"That's an elementary schooler's idea.."

"But in this 'How to Bond with Your New Employees' book, it's written that a welcoming party is very effective!"

Truly, an amateur's shallow cleverness. Ikaruga squinted and glared at Takeru.

"Do you think that brazen woman will be pleased with this?"

"We won't know until we try, right?"

"Incorrigibly clumsy... as expected of the friendless platoon's captain."

"............well I don't have any."

"I don't have any either."

Even as she condemned Takeru with an appalled expression, Ikaruga's skill wasn't bad. One could say - as expected of the aspiring Reginn, she had dexterous fingers.

"Even though you say that Suginami, you're properly helping out."

"It's captain's order. I'll do it. Also, while we don't get along with Ootori, her skill is real. I can understand why are you so stubborn about it."

Even though Ikaruga didn't acknowledge Ouka as a person, she seemed to acknowledge her skill. With soft expression Takeru scratched his cheek

"Well, that might not be all the reason."

"It's someone you fell for after all."

"...nn?"

"Have you fallen for the girl who gave you an opportunity to change, boy?"

"I'm saying that's not it, it's just something I want to do as a comrade..."

As Takeru tried to deny, Usagi had scurried over from the direction of the kitchenette.

"I'm done, Kusanagi! It is satisfactory even if I do say so myself!"

Holding a dish with a large short cake on top of it in both of her hands and cream on her cheek, Usagi stood in front of Takeru, making a confident expression. Even though she was reluctant to put on the apron provided by Ikaruga, which had a rabbit pattern on it, it has suited her very well.

Surprised, Takeru,

"Usagi, so you really can cook."

"I learned it from my grandmother when I was a child. Look, it's a short cake with red bean paste filling and cream."

Fufufun, as Usagi puffed up her chest, Ikaruga made a questioning look.

"Red bean paste and cream? Is that tasty...?"

"Hmph... rather than complain, try it yourself. This will win over that woman with ease."

She held small dishes that had portions for tasting which she held out to Takeru and Ikaruga.

Ikaruga was acting as if it was poison, but the two tasted a mouthful.

As they chewed and munched it, a surprised expression had gradually started to appear on their faces.

"...oh? It's delicious, how unexpected."

"Really, it's super tasty. Usagi, don't you really have a talent for it?."

Hearing Ikaruga's honest impression, receiving Takeru's praise, Usagi started blinking astounded. Even though she was confident earlier, a blush had appeared on her cheeks and her line of sight had wandered downwards.

"I am not really pleased with you calling my name... but to be praised like this... I di-didn't expect that."

"No no, it's really tasty. You're amazin', Usagi. I can't do anything outside of my swordsmanship so I respect you a lot."

"...i-is that so. So it is tasty. T-that is great. If people eating are happy then really... it was worth making it."

Although embarrassed, she seemed very happy. In order to cool off her flushed cheeks she put a hand on them and smiled, facing downwards.

Feeling as if her figure had overlapped with his little sister's, Takeru almost unconsciously pat Usagi's head.

But, that's when,

"——I'm entering."

Along with a knock the door had soundly opened, making everyone turn around.

Takeru hurriedly passed crackers lying on the table to the other two.

And,

pop*......*pop*.............................*pop

Completely empty sounds were let out and the timing all three crackers were popped was completely different.

Ouka who had entered showed a slightly surprised look, then displeased shook off coloured paper that covered her hair.

The air inside the room froze.

"...what is this?"

She glared at them with a fierce look.

Even so, despite his face twitching, Takeru made a cramped smile and,

"S-see... we've prepared your welcome——"

And there,Takeru noticed the state Ouka was in. Her uniform was stained with blood and dirt, not just her clothes, her own body was also full of grazes and scratches.

"...you, what are those injuries?!"

"An enemy showed just a bit of resistance. Entering combat isn't something uncommon. I successfully secured a Magical Heritage. There's no problem."

"No problem... aren't you bleeding lots?! Wait, right there."

"Rather than that, what kind of situation is this?"

Narrowing her eyes, Ouka spat these words with slight anger.

Looking through each member, she ended it by glaring strongly at Takeru.

"...a party during platoon activity time. You sure do whatever you want, captain."

"No, this, we hosted it for you..."

"......? F-for me?"

"You see, we still haven't done one yet, right? A welcome party for you."

"............"

Then, for the first time Ouka had noticed the curtain hanging from the ceiling.

For a moment she displayed a confused expression.

"We don't know much about you, and you hardly know anything about us either do you?"

"..........."

"So I thought we should deepen our camaraderie first."

As Takeru made a smile close to what a wry one, Ouka seemed slightly troubled. Her gaze wandered and she didn't know how to respond.

But gradually, a shadow appeared on her face and she breathed in lightly raising her face with her usual cold expression.

"...sorry, I don't have that much free time. You guys can do as you like."

"No, don't say that. Suginami made decorations for your sake, Usagi made you a short cake with red bean paste and cream for you. I... honestly wasn't helpful, but think of what the other two did."

"I have no intention of getting along with you. Also, unlike you... I didn't enter Inquisition to play."

After saying that much, Ouka once again opened the entrance's doors and went outside.

The expression he saw on her face from the profile wasn't necessarily an angry or one full of contempt, it somehow... looked lonely to him.

Takeru grabbed the first aid kit and jumped out of the platoon's room to follow after Ouka's back.

"Ootori!"

After finding her again, Takeru called out to her and approached in a hurry.

Ouka stopped moving in annoyance and turned around.

"What?"

"Where are you going?"

"That has nothing to do with you."

"Wait a moment, that's a terrible injury. At least let me perform first aid."

Ouka's left leg was bleeding considerably. It was painfully scrapped as if she had gotten into a traffic accident. Despite that, Ouka didn't intend to cover up her leg and once again started to walk briskly.

"I can do that much myself. I told you before, it has nothing to do with you."

"It does, you're a member of the same platoon and I'm your captain."

"...acting like a captain only at a time like this..."

She coldly glared at him.

But this time, Takeru didn't withdraw.

"Indeed. It's captain's orders. Let me treat you quietly."

Unusually forceful, Takeru protruded the first aid in front of himself.

As Takeru in front of her acted oddly strong, she let out a slightly troubled sigh.

After having Ouka sit on the bench in the courtyard, he took out disinfectant, gauze and bandage from the first aid box.

Without any prior notice, Takeru had gently touched Ouka's leg,

"Wha-?!'

"? What is it?"

"N...nothing, if you're doing it... then hurry up. The time's pressing."

Turning away with slightly red cheeks, Ouka ordered Takeru.

In order to see the wound clearly, first, Takeru washed the blood away with water.

"Good, the injury is not that serious despite all the blood."

"I told you it's not a big deal haven't I. I moved so it bled more than it should have."

"But it would be better to find a doctor or a 《Seelie》 . A scar might remain afterwards."

"That's nothing to worry about, I've had many injuries like this before."

Being told that, Takeru ended up staring intently at Ouka's legs.

"......!! What are you staring at so much..."

"Ah no... I just thought you have quite beautiful legs."

When he spoke directly what he thought, Ouka's face flared up with red.

"B...b-beautiful?"

"Yeah, beautiful enough to make me stare."

"Nhhh?!?!"

"You can't tell at the first glance but, your muscles are flexible and the balance isn't off. They're almost perfect."

"...o-ohh. So that's what you mean."

"? What else could I mean?"

"I-it's nothing. Shut up and finish it."

Ouka looked away blushing, Takeru tilted his neck.

It wasn't that Takeru had no interest in the womanly beauty of Ouka's legs nor that he was insensitive. He just had directed all his nerves towards the first aid and had completely abandoned worldly thoughts. Otherwise, clumsy Takeru would end up worsening the wound with crazy hand movements.

He carefully sprayed the wound with disinfectant.

"...nhh."

"Sorry, did it hurt?"

"It's fine. I'm used to pain."

"Haha, you sure say strange things."

"? What are you calling strange??"

"From my own experience, I know that you can't get used to pain. You can only bear it, but what hurts, hurts. Those who cry in pain when it hurts feel lesser mental burden. You could call it the little of knowledge I have? "

Laughing a bit proudly, Takeru continued treatment.

"............"

Ouka considered Takeru's words. This man says strange things, is what her expression said as she squinted.

To cry out in pain when it's painful.

These words seemed to lodge themselves in her heart a little.

Until the first aid was finished, somewhat uncomfortable, Ouka's gaze wandered all over.

"All right. It's done."

Takeru clapped his hands, wiped away the sweat from his brows and said so.

Ouka narrowed her eyes and looked at her own leg.

Her leg was wrapped with a crazy amount of bandage which ended up looking like a big lump.

"...I feel like my mobility has fallen significantly."

"A-a-haha... I guess you already knew, but I'm really clumsy"

Scratching his head, Takeru made a good-natured expression and smiled wryly.

After seeing his innocent expression, she gave up on saying things like "it would be better if I did it myself" and was unable to blame him.

Ouka touched the awkwardly bandaged wound on her leg, and stood up with a perplexed expression.

"...I-I won't thank you. it's something you did decided to do yourself."

"You don't have to. We're comrades, isn't it normal to do this?"

"............"

Displeased by the word "comrades", Ouka left Takeru and started walking

"Hey, wait. Where are you going?"

Takeru messily dropped the bandage and disinfectant in the first aid box, hurrying to keep up with Ouka.

"Platoon activity. I'm going to resolve another case."

"With your leg like that? It's better to stop... or at least include the platoon in it."

"No can do. The ones I'm chasing are too dangerous for you guys. It's even bigger deal than the case from the other day."

"...even more of a reason not to let you go. What are you chasing, Ootori? A Magical Heritage? Or maybe a witch?"

"None of your business."

"It is, I'm your captain."

Brandishing his authority as the captain again, Takeru forcibly pressed on.

Ouka was clearly irritated, but after being treated by him she was unable to deny him strongly.

Reluctantly, she stopped her legs and turned towards Takeru.

"...do you remember the 'Trackless Psalms' case?"

"? Yeah."

"It hasn't been resolved yet."

Being told that, Takeru recalled that was certainly the case.

When they rushed in, they missed the person who looked like the trading partner.

"There's too many mysteries about that bunch. They were armed too well to be mere mafia members and after interrogating them, there's no doubt that the 'Trackless Psalms' wasn't the main goods they traded."

"Can it be, that you got a hold of information on the buyer?"

"No, I haven't gotten that far yet. Even though I was given priority for interrogating the people I caught, I haven't gotten much useful information. However, I have gotten a hold of details on the goods traded. It seemed to be fragments of a Magical Heritage. The only thing that could be identified from the fragments was the blade, so it should have the form of a sword."

"Fragments... doesn't a Magical Heritage lose its value when its destroyed, because the operative procedure is also destroyed?"

"Indeed. They were trading something that supposedly had no value, for a large sum. That means the other party was unlikely to be a trader or a collector."

"? Why?"

As Takeru was full of questions for a while already, Ouka openly made an irritated expression.

"What would an amateur do with a fragment. The possibility of the trading partner being a member of the magical society is considerably high."

"A m-magic society... a collective of witches and sorcerers? Do these kind of anachronistic organizations exist these days?"

Since I stick to using my sword I shouldn't be saying that I guess, Takeru thought. In the modern times witches are being administered and it was extremely difficult for them to form and act as a faction.

However, as if to say she's not joking, Ouka squinted.

"《Valhalla》. It's mainly shrouded in mysteries, but that magic society undeniably exists."

Takeru heard that name before. It had appeared among the rumours floating around the school, it's a collective said to be an urban legend. According to the rumour, witches and sorcerers that have survived the war teamed up and work together in order to overthrow the Inquisition or something.

If that was to be real, it would be outrageous. It was unknown if the modern weapons could compete with the witches of old. Between the modern and the past days, the witches were overwhelmingly more powerful in the past. There were many witches capable of using magic of a level that allowed them to fire volleys that could erase a city in an instant.

"Recently, strange incidents happen one after another. Since neither witches nor Magical Heritages were involved investigation was handed over to the police, but I don't think they are right. Those guys are gathering and trading corpses in exchange for money. The only ones that would purchase corpses, are witches."

"But... is it related with that case from before?"

"That's right, the client asked that bunch for them. 'We will buy any fresh corpses as well' they said."

Takeru involuntarily gasped. Although it was still premature to assume the other party was 《Valhalla》 with just these similarities, certainly he could see how was it connected to the case of "Trackless Psalms".

He had no idea what was the criminals' goals, but normally thinking,

"I think they are preparing for something. Whether it's 《Valhalla》 or not, the involvement of witches and Magical Heritages is clear. Right now, I'm going to the cult's meeting place I was anonymously tipped of."

"Can it be, that lately you've been investigating that corpse-collecting group alone?"

"Yeah, the seized Magical Heritages were a by-product of it."

What an aggressive woman... Takeru thought once again.

"That should be enough. Now that you know, you can go back to the platoon's room to flirt."

"Nono, wait. If the opponent is 《Valhalla》 and witches, then doesn't it exceed of what students can deal with? Shouldn't you report the information you obtained to Dullahan?"

"Hmph... the Dullahan bunch is working on an entire pile of unrelated cases. And they won't properly take it up. When I took care of it as Dullahan, all I got in response whenever I reported was that it's under police's jurisdiction. Even alone I can resolve this case."

As she said so, a dim light had dwelled in Ouka's pupils, she clenched her fist.

From the way she spoke, it seemed like she was investigating this matter before she was fired. In her eyes something like tenacity could be seen, but Takeru didn't think that was it.

It was deep, deep grief.

Very similar to hatred...

"...understand now? The people I'm chasing are too heavy for you guys, Inquisition won't recognize them as a target for point acquisition. There's no merit in this investigation for you as you're aiming to acquire points... don't come."

Even if you come you'll just get in the way, the way she said that hinted she was worried about the members' safety.

Ouka walked away briskly.

Takeru felt like stopping there. However, knowing that Ouka was going to involve herself with something that dangerous and letting her go alone, would disqualify him from being the captain.

"I'll be going with you."

"............ Why?"

"Why you ask... there's no way I can let someone this hurt go off alone. Since you won't listen when I tell you to stop, I'll go with you."

Ouka furrowed her eyebrows, slightly annoyed.

"...I said the injury is not a problem."

"Even if you're not bothered with it, it's going to dull your movements during an emergency."

"No such thing will happen to me. In the first place, it doesn't hurt at all."

"Even if you endure it, it must hurt."

"I'm told you, it doesn't hurt."

"It definitely hurts."

"It doesn't hurt."

"It hurts."

"Persistent."

"Is that something a sore loser should be saying?"

Seeing Takeru not budge an inch, Ouka made a honestly fed up expression.

In the end, the one who gave in was Ouka.

After Takeru and Ouka finished the first aid, they prepared the equipment and have arrived at the site.

Takeru proposed they invite Usagi and Ikaruga, but it was rejected by Ouka. He wanted to tell her she's stubborn, but she said that they are going enter confined spaces and it was better to go with a small number of people this time, which convinced Takeru.

The location was a relatively large prefabricated hut in the harbour of what once was called Tokyo Bay.

The relatively large prefab was standing alone on the grass near the container yard. It was relatively large, standing in the middle of the grass by the container yard.

From looks alone, the hut looked like it was deserted, but there were many strange things about it. Unlike it's beat-up appearance, just the door and the locks alone were new. Also, the chains were coiled around the padlock several times.

It was clear there were signs of people in here.

Takeru and Ouka stood on door's sides, checking up on the lock.

After confirming that it couldn't be opened normally, Ouka pulled out a sawed-off shotgun from the holster on her back

She tried to give it to Takeru. You destroy the lock, is what it meant.

"............*shake* *shake* *shake*!"

"............"

Ouka didn't know about Takeru prowess in handling guns that was close to being a curse. In all seriousness, in the worst case scenario he could even hit Ouka.

She made a genuinely disappointed expression, took distance from the door and raised the shotgun.

A deafening gunshot resounded. The lock was blown off and the door was opened.

Takeru immediately kicked the door wide open.

"Idiot, I should rus——"

Ouka tried to stop Takeru, in that instant.

——*piin*, a sound of something being pulled had reached them.

"——Kusanagi!!"

Being called out to, Takeru turned around.

What he saw, was Ouka's figure suddenly embrace him.

Being hit by something that was more like a tackle than an embrace, unable to receive it Takeru had fallen over.

Momentarily, a girl's distinct scent had tickled his nose. Their lips nearly overlapped, making him gasp.

His consciousness was almost overtaken by desire, immediately after, a tremendous roar came from behind the door he was about to rush into.

As he coughed in the smoke, Takeru understood what happened.

"N-no way... a trap?!"

"Stand! They'll run away!"

Before Takeru even noticed, Ouka's figure ran behind the prefab.

When he immediately chased after her, he saw a black van that had just started its engine and started to drive off. It was prepared so that they were able to escape at any time when the trap had gone off

"Damn it... we're too late."

As the van continued to grow smaller, Takeru scowled.

"No, not yet."

Ouka changed the magazine in her gun to live ammunition and poised on knee.

And then, she fired three times in succession, the barrel oddly jumping upwards.

The van that was already as small as a pea.

"As expected it's impossi——"

Just as Takeru spoke, the small-looking van in the distance started to sway. It had directly hit a container nearby and fell upside down. It seemed like all bullets shot by Ouka hit the van's tires.

"...........you must be joking."

"It's made really well... but the recoil is nasty."

Ouka said so as she pulled the magazine out of the gun, then stood up with a cool expression.

Even though it was partially thanks to Ikaruga's specially-made gun and ammunition, the enemy's escape route being in a straight line and that there was no wind, with a handgun that had a recoil like that to shoot a tire of a car so far away, her skill was beyond amazing.

Takeru was dumbfounded, unable to believe what happened in front of him.

"Kusanagi, secure the guys in the car. I will check the building."

"...g-got it. Thanks for saving me earl——"

"Don't thank me, hurry up!"

Being yelled at, Takeru ran over to the fleeing car.

He no longer knew which one of them was the captain.

Takeru handcuffed the three men who had lost consciousness in the van, then quickly returned to the hut, entering from the door in the back.

After reaching it, he entered through the door in the back.

Immediately after entering, he noticed an abnormality inside.

A strange smell. A nauseating odour like that of blood.

Remaining wary, Takeru moved through the hut's corridor. His legs carried him in the direction smell was coming from.

At the end of the corridor, there was a room that was probably a bedroom. Behind the wide-opened door, he found Ouka.

Holding his nose, he peeked into her face.

"..........."

With eyes wide open, Ouka's movements stopped completely.

Takeru tried to say something, but then.

"What h——gh...?!!"

As the intensity of the odour couldn't be compared to how it was earlier, he involuntarily held his nose.

The scent of blood felt as if it had pierced his eyes. Takeru somehow endured what welled up from his stomach and grasped the situation inside the room.

——Inside, there was hell.

Packed in plastic bags, were countless human parts. Hands and legs, heads and torsos. Split in five, there were countless human parts packed the bags segregated by body part.

However, the problem didn't lie there.

"...aaa....aa..."

Unconsciously, he spilled something like a wail.

The curtain was being swayed by wind blowing through the window. The evening sunlight had entered the room through cream-coloured curtains.

The surface of the wall was covered with copious amounts of blood that had splashed over it.

And in the middle of that hell, on top of the bed slept a young child.

The centre of the child's chest was pierced with a knife.

"______"

Takeru squinted with a chagrin and bit his lip.

The help that comes in the nick of time like in films or dramas was mostly impossible in reality. The probability of rescue coming just in time was equal nearly to none. He knew that. When he had decided to join Inquisition, to an extent he was prepared to see such a scene.

Yes, he was prepared.

But this... was too much.

It was too real.

"..........."

Ouka had stretched out a trembling hand towards the boy who had become cold.

With unsteady hands she raised the boy's body and hugged him like hugging a baby.

"...I'm sorry...I was too late."

It was a trembling, gentle voice.

"It must've been hard. It must've hurt...but you no longer have to suffer..."

Hugging the boy's dead body. Ouka stroked his cheek.

"Sorry... It's all right now. Onee-chan... will shoulder all of it..."

Takeru couldn't keep looking at this scene, full of affection and incredibly sad.

It was too sad, miserable.

"Onee-chan will... all of it."

That's why.

"All of it...!!"

That's why, he was slightly late to notice the abnormality in Ouka.

When he looked away, using that opportunity Ouka had put the boy down and pulled out the shotgun on her back.

He had no idea what was she doing for a moment, but when he saw her back as she turned away, he understood.

There were no anaesthesia bullets for a shotgun. It was loaded with lethal mithril bullets.

Ouka intended to kill the three inside the car.

"——Ootori!"

As she tried to leave the room and head towards the criminals, Takeru had pounced after her and grasped to hold her back.

"What are you doing!"

"Move."

"Stop it, you can't! If you kill those bastards here, there'll be no 'again' for you!"

"Let go."

"Stop! If you kill them, everything will be for naught!"

"Let go!"

Frantic, Ouka tried to escape Takeru's constraint. Her cheeks wet with tears, murderous intent in her eyes, she screamed.

Seeing her ghastly appearance, Takeru thought he has to stop her no matter what.

He desperately hugged her, lowering her gun.

"——I won't let you! Didn't you become an inquisitor to stop people from ending up like this child?! Isn't that right?!"

"...ughh...!"

"I don't know you but... that's definitely it, right?! If you screw up here, you won't be able to save people you normally would...!"

"Khh...uuu, uuu...!!"

"Are you fine with that?!"

"Uuu...uuuhhh..."

Takeru's voice had probably reached her at last and she had stopped struggling.

She fell on her knees, dropping her gun.

Then, Ouka put a hand on her mouth, vomited and lost consciousness on spot.

A cemetery in a place far away from the bustle of the city.

Because there was a beautiful park full of autumn leaves nearby, it was considerably busy during the day.

The voices of children playing in the park. Lovers exchanging kisses.

In this place, their happiness seemed mysteriously distant.

Here, in the open there was just sorrow. That's the impression the visitors had.

"............"

Ouka squat down in front of a single grave, she was staring at the tombstone for roughly an hour.

Standing, Takeru watched her back as she remained like that.

After the incident, Takeru had contacted the Inquisition, calling Seelie troop and Spriggans. After briefly reporting to them, he intended to take Ouka to the hospital.

However, Ouka declined the offer and came to this place alone.

Takeru, not wanting to leave her alone had walked behind her, until now.

"...about earlier, sorry, I lost composure."

With her back still turned towards him, Ouka spoke.

"Why did you come with me?"

"Because I was worried, obviously."

An immediate answer. Ouka's hair swayed in silence as she looked towards him.

"............why?"

A fragile voice. It was completely different from Ouka's usual dignified and clear voice.

He was unable to take off his eyes from the fleeting expression he hadn't seen on Ouka before. When he saw her sleepy, somehow fatigued appearance, an inexplicable urge to hug her had struck Takeru.

"That'd be... cause I'm your captain."

"...that again."

"Despite everything, I want us to become comrades. I-is that bad?"

"There's no way you'd like a person like me to be your comrade."

Denying Takeru's answer, Ouka faced forward again.

"...you've become disillusioned haven't you."

"Disillusioned? By what?"

"With my outrage earlier. Honestly, weren't you taken aback?"

"...I wasn't taken aback, but I was surprised."

Hearing Takeru's honest answer, a wry smile leaked on Ouka's face.

"I think you know it already... it's absolutely no good. When I'm in front of an atrocious enemy, blood rushes to my head. I forget myself and I squeeze the trigger, executing them. Especially if it's criminals who sacrifice the children."

"..........."

"《Crimson Princess》... good grief, that nickname really fits me."

The cases she was involved in all ended up with crimson sea of blood.

That's why 《Crimson Princess》.

But, from what Ouka said, he felt like she didn't behave in that manner because she wanted to. Surely, Ouka had carried too much of something inside of her.

"With that as the reason, I was fired from Inquisition. In fact, I'm not in a position to blame you guys either. I'm even more defective than you are."

Ouka said that along with a sigh, took out anpan and milk she had bought in the convenience store on the way, put it down as an offering on the tomb in front of her and joined her hands together.

Once again silence had taken over.

"...this tomb, is it your family's?"

"...it's my parents... and little sister's tomb."

"So you had a sister."

"Yes. I *had* one."

Ouka poked the milk bottle with a finger.

"...my little sister loved it; anpan with milk."

Her voice unsteady, Ouka said so with nostalgia.

It was the first time Takeru heard Ouka speak so gently.

"Even though I told her such thing can't be delicious... 'Eat it, eat it'... she asked me to try it time after time."

Takeru listened in silence. Not making any sounds, he just focused on listening.

"I was stubborn, I refused many times saying I don't want to. When I did, every time she puffed her cheeks angrily saying 'even though it's so tasty', like a kid, right? Because it was delicious for her, it must be delicious for others, that's how she thought."

"............"

"............in the end, I didn't eat it a single time while my little sister was still alive."

"............"

"Even though... it's so delicious."

Suddenly, Ouka's hand poking the milk bottle was lowered.

Her sunset hair was swept by the wind, dancing in the cold air.

While watching Ouka's small back, Takeru lowered his gaze.

I need to ask, he thought. If he averts his eyes here, surely, Ouka will once again walk alone. He couldn't help but think so.

"...can it be, that your family was..."

"............"

"Your... sister..."

The words he tried to use were stuck in his throat and wouldn't come out.

At a time like this, he couldn't make himself step into Ouka's darkness. Takeru felt he was being pathetic.

But, before Takeru took that step,

"Yeah... that's right."

Ouka stood up and turned around vigorously.

And as if thrusting it at him,

"My family was killed by a witch."

As if to cast it off, Ouka spoke of her darkness.

* * *

Ouka was an orphan.

It seemed like when she was a baby, she was discarded in a garbage dump along with her real mother's corpse.

She didn't seem able to open up her heart in the orphanage and was said to be a quiet child who hasn't spoken at all.

The ones who took such a girl in were Ouka's foster parents, now dead.

A cheerful father, a gentle mother.

And a cute little sister.

Ouka's frozen heart had gradually melted as she interacted with family.

But, one day.

Suddenly, a witch came to their home.

『"——Now, kill your dad and mom."』

It was an incredibly gentle, eerie voice.

『"——If you do it, you'll save your precious little sister's life."』

It was something that happened when Ouka finally grown familiar with the family and the time she called her foster parents with "father" and "mother".

Why was it Ouka's house, it was unknown.

The witch had come to their house and held out a knife to Ouka.

And said to her.

If you kill your father and mother, you'll save your little sister's life.

Ouka cried not wanting to. She screamed she doesn't want to kill. But the witch didn't allow it. The witch's body trembled with delight and joy, giggling.

She didn't know what to do. She didn't want to kill her dad and mom. But if she didn't, her precious little sister... she would lose her little sister that always smiled when was with her.

Ouka's heart was torn apart. She become a mere, crying doll.

Unable to hold the knife any longer, she tried to let go of it with her fingers.

That's when, father and mother, as if to embrace Ouka, have stabbed the knife into their chests.

——It's all right...

She felt the disappearing warmth of her father and mother's skin.

——It's okay...

While listening to their gentle voices.

——Take care of your... little sister.

Ouka broke.

『"You did your best... but it's a shame."』

The witch laughed.

『"You were too slow... time is out."』

The witch laughed.

Loudly. Happily. Joyfully. The witch had spread despair.

Ouka felt something depriving her body of freedom. Her legs moved on their own and she had approached the little sister that sat on the floor.

Her consciousness was clear.

——I'm scared.

The feeling of the knife in her hand.

——I'm scared, Onee-chan.

Her little sister's frightened voice.

——Save me... Onee-chan.

The feeling of cutting her little sister apart.

——W-hy... Onee...-cha...

Retaining her consciousness clearly, Ouka has cut her beloved little sister into pieces.

She wanted to scream, but couldn't. She wanted to cry, but no tears have come out.

Her body didn't listen to her. Her heart shattered like glass. She wanted to end her life right away.

That's right, she wished for it.

In the end, the witch ordered Ouka.

『" Laugh "』

The meat on her cheek convulsed, her mouth forcibly drew an arc.

And in a loud, husky and sorrowful voice.

Ouka, in front of the death of her beloved family, Had been forced to laugh.

* * *

...gruesome, is all he could call it.

Ouka's darkness. Ouka's truth. Her reason to fight. The reason this girl lost control.

It was all too sad.

"I've had everything taken away from me by a witch. I won't forgive that witch. And..."

A dark flame had dwelled inside her pupils, she directed murderous intent at a witch that was elsewhere.

Stopping in middle of the sentence, Ouka stared at her palm.

She squinted and very bitterly, she squeezed her fist.

"...I, I won't forgive it. I will exterminate witches all of my life, I vowed to do so for the sake of their victims. That's what I've lived for until now. From now on as well... until I die."

"............"

"That's my everything."

After she finished speaking, Ouka stared at Takeru as if glaring, then suddenly narrowed her eyes and smiled wryly.

"Now you understand. I'm just going to cause you trouble. In the same manner, others get in the way of my revenge."

Ouka placed a hand on her chest and spoke to Takeru apologetically.

"I'm already broken. My going out of control is unstoppable. That's why, leave me alone already."

"............"

"I won't become your comrade."

With a clear voice and a clear look in her eyes,

Staring straight at Takeru, Ouka has...

No, that's not it..

Takeru denied Ouka's words.

What he saw two years ago. The image of absolutely strong opponent with sunset hair.

Ootori Ouka.

For Takeru, that was the existence that had gave him a chance to change

The person herself who has stopped him.

In the past, Takeru too just like Ouka had rushed forward fuelled by hatred. In the past, Takeru too, was broken in the same way Ouka was.

But, he was able to stop. In the wake of his defeat, he was able to turn back.

That's why he denied.

"You will become a comrade."

Takeru denied her loneliness.

"I won't deny your revenge. But a life of only revenge, is too sad no matter how you look at it."

"...even if it's sad, it has to be done."

"I know. I won't stop you from doing it. I won't say pretty words like 'nothing comes out of revenge'."

"............"

"But in exchange."

Puzzled, Ouka tilted her head slightly.

Staring straight at Ouka, Takeru pointed at himself with a thumb.

And said.

"——Let me carry half of the burden."

With these words, Ouka's facial expressions disappeared.

Carry? Just what did he mean by that?

"I said I'm going to help you. You and I together, let's go all out and judge evil witches. Take revenge for your family. How about it?"

Ouka was speechless.

As if to say she didn't understand.

"...what...are you..."

"Exactly what I said."

Seeing Takeru say that with a straight face, Ouka had finally exploded with anger.

"Don't get carried away! Why would someone unrelated like you help me with revenge?!"

"I told you, because I think of us as of comrades."

Takeru said while tilting his head.

Ouka placed her hand on the forehead as if she had a headache and staggered.

"S-still... how did that turn into helping me...!!"

"Can't I?"

"There's a limit to being shameless! There's a limit to meddling! My revenge belongs only to me!"

"I'm not stealing it from you. Two is better than one, right? Simple calculation. Even a monkey would understand. That's why even I can understand."

"Ughh?!...nonono! As if I'd involve you with my revenge...!!"

"I don't mind it at all?"

"I do mind it!"

"Eh... whyy?"

Takeru made a seriously troubled face and tilted his neck again.

Ouka's words didn't get through to him, her irritation coming from the fact it wouldn't turn into a proper conversation was angrily pointed at Takeru.

"What the hell you're saying...! You trample over other's circumstances! Comrades? That's not a reason to involve yourself with someone else's revenge!!"

She said so, her shoulders raising roughly as she breathed in.

While breathing heavily as well, Takeru stared straight at Ouka.

"Not just because we're comrades. There's one more, a reason because of which I want to help you."

"Stop messing...!"

"Because you seem in pain."

Ouka was taken aback from surprise, she made an expression that said she didn't understand anything.

"Haa?! I'm not in pai——"

"Then, why are you crying?"

…………

"......?"

"Aren't you crying now. A lot of tears are pooling in your eyes."

"No...this is..."

"It's been like that since we visited the grave."

For the first time, Ouka had touched her own cheek.

Seeing the tear clinging to her fingertips, she was at a loss for words.

"Tears come together with pain. There's no need to bear with it."

"No...way..."

"You don't have to bear with it any longer, Ootori."

He spoke to the stunned Ouka in a gentle voice.

Helping with revenge. Actually, it was just Takeru's ego. He had no intention of denying that.

Still, Takeru was unable to leave it like that.

"I won't let you stay alone for any longer."

He could no longer let go of the crying girl in front of him.

"Not as your captain. As a human being called Kusanagi Takeru, I will walk by your side."

When her revenge is over, having no one by her side would be too sad.

That's why, he thought it would be good if she had another person walk the thorny road together with her.

"No, I'll have you let me walk beside. From now on, we'll cry together, suffer together... and stubbornly, fight together."

If there's no one else, he had to do it by himself,

When they get tired, it would be fine if they rest on each other's shoulders.

Even I should be able to do that much, he thought.

With drops of water spilling from her eyes, Ouka stood in daze.

To be dependant on someone... me...? So the revenge for my family... is painful...?

I won't admit it. I won't admit it. I cannot acknowledge it. If I do that, I'll end up moving on. I'll end up troubling unrelated people.

Ouka wiped her tears and looked at Takeru.

These tears are a lie. They're from her real feelings. She showed a strong look like that.

"Ha...haha, help me with what... ridiculous. What can you even do with your strength."

"...so you're still saying things like that... certainly, my strength may not be that great. But it should be enough to stop your tears."

"S-shut up! I'm not crying! You haven't acquired a single Magical Heritage nor arrested a single witch so far... what use is there of you?! Someone like you who can't do anything but swordsmanship... I... I don't need someone like that!"

"............"

"Mere swordsmanship won't be of any use for my revenge!!"

Ouka spoke thoughtlessly. Even though she wasn't bothered about fighting strength, she pushed Takeru away.

"............"

She had certainly pushed him away.

However, that,

"...okaay, I get it."

Had instead lit a fire in Takeru.

Or it could be restated that she had stepped on it.

On Takeru's land mine.

"Eh?"

"If you say so, it can't be helped."

As Takeru's tone of voice changed, Ouka raised her face with stunned expression.

He slowly touched the sword at his waist and pulled it out all at once.

Reflecting the sunlight, the sword's blade shone brilliantly.

In that light, stood a demon laughing fearlessly.

"What results do I need to let you help me? A B-rank Magical Heritage? A-rank? or maybe an S-rank?"

"......? W-what... are you saying?"

"Fine, I don't care which one it is. I'll prove it to you. Whether its B, A, S or SS. I'll gather them all up and send them back, just you look."

He declared.

"Prepare yourself, Ootori Ouka."

With a confident expression, like a demon he declared that.

Ouka didn't know. She hasn't seen it, so she didn't know

For this man, Kusanagi Takeru, calling swordsmanship useless was a taboo.

Once he ends up like this, he can't be stopped.

Since it had come to this, Ouka could only give up.

She could only let Takeru support her revenge.

＊＊＊

"M〜〜mm, wonderful weather. It would be nice to spend such a day holed up in a room and work hard at surfing the net, looking at erotic images. 2D ones——you think so too, right, Nacht?"

"I said, I don't think so."

Feeling the cool autumn wind with his entire body, the necromancer Haunted had said something unhealthy while stretching grandly. The black garments have fit his refreshing face to an unpleasant extent and his behaviour was inexplicably mysterious.

The sword that was hanging on his waist, Nacht, had brushed off his words seeking consent. As If I'd let myself be lumped together with such pervert, she thought.

The location they were in was on top of a major company's rooftop. Standing on top of the heliport circle drawn on the roof, Haunted overlooked the city below.

"It's really calm, this is a really different sight from when I was alive. Nobody is starving, nobody is scared. The word 'peace' refers to a sight like this, doesn't it."

Deeply emotional, he followed the people in the city with his gaze.

"A scenery like this isn't bad. It does calm your mind. Elementary students' smiles, middle school girls flashing their bras, high school girl's miniskirts... I believe it's all precious."

"...disgusting."

Nacht threw a quiet insult at him.

Not noticing that, Haunted closed his eyes and spread his arms wide.

"...but."

His appearance could be called sorrowful, as if he froze with a empty hole in the centre of his chest. A sad look.

"But... however. This place is lacking something crucial to people... it's lacking what's indispensable to humans beings... that's right, if I were to name it."

Haunted extended his spread arms towards the heaven, tears appeared in his eyes.

And——

"——There's no love!!!"

He slammed the palm of his hand into the centre of the heliport with all his might.

Momentarily, on the brand-new heliport appeared a reddish-brown circle. It was huge and circular, covering the entire roof. Haunted knelt in the centre, pulled cross-knife from his waist and has stabbed his palm with abandon.

Again and again.

"No tomorrow!! No hope!! No craving!! No despair!! No screams!! There's no madness of gushing blood and dancing meat!! People living in such penance that is this false peace should entertain themselves, continue seeking enjoyment!!"

A copious amount of blood had flowed from his hand full of holes. The blood didn't spread on the roof but had drawn a mysterious pattern instead.

The circle of light was propagated further by the blood, continuing to form an enormous magic circle.

"Now show it... show me, children of peace... the end of this peaceful era... pull up the curtains of comfort..."

After completing the magic, Haunted had sought the sky, his expression drowning in joy.

Whether it's was coincidence or not, from between the clouds in the sky, light poured down straight at him.

He once again touched the centre of the magic circle with his fingertips and closed his eyes, taking out a thick book from his pocket. The book turbulent winds had opened the book and soundly flapped the pages.

【"Time had cometh. The deceased stained carrion, bestowed with blood clot of female goat. With the song of victory sung three times, thou shalt not stop pace of thy march. There is no glory ahead of here, there is no fall. Only battle maidens——awaiting thy triumphal return."】

After Haunted finished the chant, he opened his eyes wide and released the magical power in his body towards the magic circle through his fingertip.

The roof's concrete surface waved like water, it was accompanied by lightning. Increasingly, the lightning had become huge and flew in the sky like dragons, lighting it up.

『"——GUOOA....aaAAAa...aA"』

And it had come forth, the variant messenger. That variant's huge body had crawled out from the liquefied floor.

With loud and imposing, metallic sounds the huge body had knelt on spot.

In front of the wordless variant, "Yup." Haunted had nodded with satisfaction.

"Now then... let's give you some work. The target is AntiMagic Academy, the contraindicated area the witches that had sinned are being held."

『"..........."』

"Rescue the 《Valhalla》's VIP that has been captured and is being held there."

Taking sound footsteps, he approached the summoned variant and hit it with his fist.

"Well then, do your best. Mr. world's most famous hero."

The screams and fumes after explosions have rose up from the city soon afterwards.

* * *

Seeing explosions and smoke raise from the distant town centre, both Takeru and Ouka on the cemetery were horrified.

The ground below them vibrated slightly.

"?! What?!"

"......!!"

Their whole bodies stiffened, they have looked towards the city together.

At the same time, the wristwatch-type device sounded an alarm. This alarm meant there an emergency meeting of the Inquisition's entirety and not only the school. There probably weren't many people who had heard this alarm before.

The reason for it, was because it had last sounded 20 years ago.

Explosions and screams sounded in the distance. Their number increased at eerily fast pace.

Because of the huge difference between this calm park and the distant tragedy, it was so unrealistic Takeru stood rooted on spot.

Everyone in the park had reacted in the same way he did.

Among them, Ouka alone had a grasp on the situation and looked over the urgent matters on the stereoscopic display device.

Her expression cramped instantly and she shut her mouth tight.

"What happened?"

Ouka had turned around to look at horrified Takeru.

And the girl who had lived on by nourishing herself with revenge spoke just one word.

"——Terrorism."

The screams and explosions were further gaining in the momentum.

Chapter 4 - Hero Summoning

Leaving Takeru behind, Ouka dashed in the school's direction.

Screams have sounded from all over the city. It was easy for Ouka to determine what was the enemy.

The variants rampaged in the city. They looked humanoid, were skin-coloured and extended long tongues. They had no eyes or noses, the only thing they possessed were ears and big gaping mouth.

"——A necromancer!!"

Necromancers. Filthy witches specializing in summoning spirits, who use earthen puppets and corpses as soldiers.

These variants were without a doubt corpses. She could tell by the putrid smell and their behaviour. Necromancers manipulating corpses often seal organs not necessary to fulfil the purpose. The reason for that, is said to be because corpses retaining all five senses have a sense of self.

Since eyes and nose were sealed, they used auditory sense.

It was much more troublesome than vision. The enemy has expected the city residents would run away screaming loudly.

"——I'm an inquisitor! Try not to make any sounds as much as possible! If you scream you'll be assaulted! Try not to make any sounds!"

Ouka's voice was drowned in everyone's screams and didn't reach everyone.

"The Spriggans aren't here yet...!?"

After hurrying to the intersection Ouka stopped her legs, pulled out the gun in the middle of the escaping mob and directed it into the sky. She fired several bullets one after another. By doing so, she had the corpses change their target to herself.

The corpses had saliva hanging down from their mouths, they lowered their bodies and assaulted her. Judging from their bodily abilities, the material was definitely still fresh.

Ouka's pupils were dyed with anger.

"——Scumbags!!"

At the same time as she roared, Ouka pulled out a spare gun from the holster.

With all the hatred she had for the necromancer, she poised the handgun horizontally and shot a corpse. When her bullets ran out, she jumped and hit it with a powerful roundhouse kick.

The enemy didn't seem to go down. Ouka switched between her legs and retaining the momentum she had dropped her body low, kicking upwards. Meanwhile she discarded a gun and pulled out a magazine attached to the gun belt on her thigh, reloading.

Until her attacks have stopped, she was like a storm showering enemy with bullets and kicks.

"............"

All the corpses going rampant at the intersection were wiped out in no time. Ouka replaced the magazine again and without lowering her guard, she looked at her surroundings.

There was no one there. The corpses' bodily functions stopped and the only thing that remained were corpses of the victims.

The enemy had gotten up again, raising groans as if they were suffering.

It wasn't the corpses Ouka had taken down. It were the corpses of the victims that had risen.

The nasty thing about necromancers, was their magical power's contagiousness. People bitten by those monsters called corpse-devourer demons, become the very same corpse-devourer demons.

A scene like that from a B-grade horror film had spread around Ouka.

When she once again was about to enter battle readiness.

From behind her, along with gunfire bullets have swept down on the corpses

The reinforcements, inquisitors from the "Spriggan" have finally arrived. Armed with the newest models of Dragoon and assault motorcycles they moved in front of Ouka.

The inquisitor leading them had stopped the engine of the motorcycle and stopped in front of her.

"A student from a test platoon, huh. This place's fine now, hurry up and return to school."

The man who looked like a captain blurted that out after coming so late.

Ouka was tempted to complain to him, but instead asked a few questions to grasp the current situation.

"The alarm has been sounded, so besides Spriggan, Dullahan should also have been dispatched, right? Where are they?"

"No clue. We received orders to get rid of the Corpse Devourers from the city, that's all."

The inquisitor got off from his motorcycle and holding a gun in his hand he gave instructions to his subordinates. He didn't seem concerned with Ouka.

"The enemy isn't just the necromancer and the Corpse Devourers. There wouldn't be any explosion with just this much. Just what is going on here?"

"No idea. But one of my subordinates has come in contact with it. From what he said..."

After he finished giving orders, raising his gun, he turned with his back to Ouka.

As he was leaving, he left behind these words.

"——It seems like an 《Einherjar》 appeared."

Hero. That word turned Ouka speechless.

——The AntiMagic Academy chairman's room.

Overlooking the hectic school grounds from the window, Sougetsu turned on the radio device the desk was equipped with.

"So, how does it look like?"

《"We have been contacted by the Spriggans in the front. Or rather, we're hearing their screams of agony, would you like to hear it?"》

"Please."

bshht. The sound signalized the communication switch and a terrible noise had entered Sougetsu's ears. it took some time to recognize a person's voice mixed in among the screams.

《"This is the eighth Spriggan squad! Enemy isn't just Corpse-Devouring Demons! I repeat! Enemy isn't just Corpse Devourers! Send support immediate——"》

Right after that, a scream sounded.

The communication was switched again, this time there was a sound of building collapsing and a faint breathing.

《"Quickly...requesting Dullahan's...support. Anti-magic...firearms...aren't working. We think enemy is...a product of summoning magic..an 《Einherjar》. ...he...uses a Magical Heritage..."》

"............"

《"I saw...its...intrinsic magic. Eleven...knights...at once...that hero is...surely......———"》

A ringing sound. As if something was charging.

The inquisitor words could no longer be heard and the next moment, the communication was disrupted by a roar.

Sougetsu stood with eyes wide open, frozen stiff.

《"That, was the last communication from Spriggan troops. Next I'll display on the monitor."》

The person he was speaking with, the secretary had displayed an image on the monitor built into the glass window.

Displayed on it was an image of something like a giant wearing a golden armour... an artificially-created monster that looked like a mechanical doll.

《"What do you think, Chairman?"》

"...yeah, there's no doubt. The body seems different, but the enemy's an Einherjar. Moreover, a really powerful one."

After saying "hero", Sougetsu shuddered.

—— 《Einherjar》 ——

A magical organism that had been considered by Inquisition as something of the past.

It was a certain summoning magic that had been used by the enemy witches in Witch-Hunt War era.

Among the high-level summoning magic, exist three impossible to use in the current era.

《Hero Summoning》, 《Legend Summoning》, 《Myth Summoning》.

One of them, the Hero Summoning, was a magic used once 150 years ago. Even among witches it was a treated as a forbidden, heretical magic.

In the past magical organisms were rampant all over the world, it was an era where magic was treated as something natural. It was an era where many warriors holding power comparable to gods have existed. Their feats of valour were handed down after their death and remained in the modern as the stories of heroes.

During the war, the cornered witches revived and used them to further their outrage. This summoning could only be used at expanse of tens of thousands innocent lives, which resulted with many precious lives being lost.

It wasn't magic that could be used by ordinary people. And yet, it was once again revived in the modern times.

Sougetsu's shoulders trembled... from laughter.

"——Kukuku, kuhahahaha! To think they'd pull out something like a Hero again! Just how in hell did Valhalla summon that thing I wonder!"

There was no report recently that would imply tens of thousands dying.

Having no idea what method did they use, Sougetsu held his belly and laughed.

"...nice, so nostalgic, it's getting interesting. I wonder if they're going to start it again, a war where a ridiculous amounts of people are going to die ."

Madness dwelled inside Sougetsu's eyes.

The secretary with whom he was speaking seemed to be confused.

《"...umm, Chairman, what are we going to do? While it's slow, the hero is heading straight for the academy."》

"Their aim is the tower with sealed Magical Heritages... no, it's contraindicated area witches are held in, I guess... well, what to do. Against a hero, Spriggans are quite lacking in power..."

That's when Sougetsu narrowed his eyes, making his usual smile like that of a Cheshire cat.

"Ahh... that's right. There is one, a fellow perfect for this. I see, now that I think of it... it's a good opportunity to for that fellow to awaken."

《"...Chairman?"》

"We'll have a broadcast to all the students. Connect my microphone to all the speakers within the grounds."

《"Y-yes. Is it going to be evacuation orders?"》

As the confused secretary asked, "Evacuation? Don't say such foolish things!" Sougetsu answered wildly.

"We don't want to shave off such a fighting potential. We've got them, right? So much human resources we could build a wall! "

Hearing Sougetsu's response, the secretary had realized what he was trying to do.

《"Chairman, that's too much!! We should immediately give permission for Relic Eaters usage and dispatch Dullahans!"》

"Of course, I'll dispatch them. But I'll dispatch the Dullahan bunch only in case it gets out of hand. What, it's just one hero. High ranking witches are much more scary. With Relic Eaters they would easily smash it."

《"Then why... why is there a need to use the students?! They aren't regular inquisitors yet, right?!"》

The secretary's screams didn't reach Sougetsu.

"...well theen, I wonder if he'll properly contract with her."

There was no longer anyone who could stop his laughter.

"Damn it! That Ootori... leaving me and going off alone like that!"

Takeru borrowed a bicycle that was lying on the road and headed towards the school with all he had.

It was only his guess, but Ouka had headed in the direction witch was in. In other words, where the explosions were occurring.

Since the explosions were slowly moving towards the school, inevitably Takeru had gotten on the road to school.

"...I've got a bad feeling."

He couldn't let Ouka head towards the witch alone like that. That's the feeling he had.

It seemed like something would happen that cannot be undone, an eerie impatience hurried Takeru.

"Don't die, Ootori...!"

Scattering droplets of sweat, Takeru rushed to the place smoke was raising from.

The crowd was already gone. Glad there was no people, Takeru rushed with the bicycle through the shopping mall, taking a short cut. The Spriggans must have already evacuated the civilians from the combat zone. Therefore, the mall was empty.

But, instead,

"——Khh."

When left the residential area and rushed through the big shopping hall on a bicycle, suddenly four naked people have come out jumping from a corner with children's clothes.

Takeru pressed brakes and stopped at verge of crashing into them.

He tried to apologize in a hurry, but immediately realized the enemy wasn't human. Heck, its obviously strange that they're naked, he retorted to himself.

Takeru confronted the eye and noseless monsters and hurriedly got off the bicycle.

Monsters have suddenly jumped at him from all directions. They were either hiding in the stores or feasting on flesh.

"...these guys are...!"

Corpse-Devouring Demons, he didn't say these words, instead Takeru had sharpened his senses and clenched the sword's handle.

Front, left, right and from behind, one each. All of them closed on him with the same timing.

He was at an overwhelming disadvantage.

But, however.

Now wasn't time to hesitate.

".....................outta way."

After understanding the enemy wasn't human, Takeru allowed the blood of his family boil in him.

To begin with, the Kusanagi-style's originally wasn't something made for fighting against other people.

That's why it could be said, this situation was perfect for Takeru.

For him, it was an ideal battlefield.

Takeru shifted the sheath attached to his waist towards his back, then twisted his body and pulled out the sword at the same time.

Kusanagi's Double-Edged style——《Single Wheel》. A sword-drawing skill that could be called heretical even among other heretical skills. He slid the sheath up to his coccyx and clenched the sheath with his left hand. And then he released the twisted upper body, matching the rotation of his hips he pulled out the sword all at once, drawing a circle.

It was technique people of the Kusanagi household once used during a siege, it was only effective against large numbers of enemy attacking and was an unusual in swordsmanship wide-range attack.

It reached 180 degrees in front. Then, without losing the momentum with sword in front, he withdrew his held out leg, swinging behind him to intercept. What he required was timing, strong hips and above all, an ability to nullify the strain on his lower body.

He released the strain without thinking, that was the Double-Edged style's irregular technique. Even though he had trained it, the burden on the waist was large and there was a chance it could miss the target. However, the Kusanagi-style had achieved 100% hit rate while bearing that burden.

Takeru took down four Corpse-Devouring Demons within one breath, stopped the momentum of the technique with his legs and sheathed the sword.

"Are these guys familiars? Their flesh is fragile like a human's but... these numbers."

As he looked around, he felt as if he was being surrounded by a pack of wolves. The Corpse Devourers have appeared from all over the mall.

He judged that it would be reckless for him to challenge the witch alone. If they were manipulating this many corpses, then it wasn't an opponent for a mere student.

However, he can't do anything at all unless he breaks through.

Whether he was to chase after Ouka or to rejoin his comrades.

"——Even if you used to be humans, I'm not nice enough to show mercy!!"

Takeru dropped his body low and kicked off the floor. He moved forward bent to an unbelievable extent. On the very verge of falling over, Takeru sprinted through the mall.

"You're in the way!!"

Going in the direction of a corpse devourer ahead, he released a slash from a sheath. Meanwhile, his legs didn't stop. The attacks released from 《Battle Driving》, a running technique handed down the Kusanagi-style had no basics the footwork was. Since he slashed while being bent forward to the limit, his entire body weight was always behind the slashes, it was more like he crushed his enemies this way rather than cut them down as he headed towards his objective.

A single point breakthrough. Since he slashed time after time using his entire body, he should be afraid of the counter, but people who have mastered Kusanagi-style had trained themselves so that they could move their upper and lower bodies independently. No matter how his legs moved, his upper body was always undisturbed and flexible.

Moreover, having unintelligent monsters as his opponents was very convenient.

It was because Kusanagi Double-Edged style was the swordsmanship that had gone against this low level magic.

Takeru crushed the attacking Corpse Devourers and broke through the mall like a fierce tiger.

He finally started to see the way out. He had only glanced at it as he ran, but couldn't find any signs of people. The enemy had senses Takeru's movements through their auditory sense and have all come rushing at Takeru, at the very least there shouldn't be any living humans nearby.

He felt relieved for the time being... but.

That's when.

For an instant, Takeru felt like he heard a bell-like sound.

He looked towards the sound source through the gap between the monsters.

And saw something unbelievable.

"——Wha..."

Standing in the mall, was a girl who looked really out of place.

Her appearance looked like an illusion, Takeru couldn't help but to doubt his own sight.

Azure hair, azure dress as well as eyes of azure colour.

"...why in such a place?!"

And of all things, while surrounded by Corpse-Devouring Demons the girl stared at Takeru.

The mysterious girl's line of sight had met Takeru's.

Along with an illusion as if the world had stopped, Takeru's thinking also stopped.

Muscles moving Takeru's body stopped and losing support, he fell forward.

"Gah——dammit!"

Unable to even take a proper posture Takeru rolled on the floor, covering himself with abrasions, he rebuilt his posture and leaped towards the girl.

At the same time, the Corpse Devourers surrounding her were about to pounce at her.

Takeru threw away his sword and in the nick of time he raised the girl in embrace. Barely avoiding enemy, he dashed towards the exit.

"What are you doing in such a place?! Didn't you hear the alarm?!"

"..........."

From his chest, the girl just looked up at him with an innocent look in her eyes and didn't say anything. Maybe because she was scared of strangers, but not to show any sign of fear during an emergency like this, she must have had nerves of steel.

Takeru exited the mall and ran to a safe street before putting down the girl and dropping on his knees.

Not concerned with the fact Takeru had a hard time, remaining expressionless, the girl stared passionately at Takeru.

In front of this wordless girl, Takeru was at his wit's end. It wouldn't be a problem if he entrusted her to the Spriggans, but the emergency shelters should be already closed and he had no way to contact the Spriggans from where he was. Were he alone he'd have no problem, but could he survive this pandemonium with a child?

As Takeru pondered about it with a hand on his chin, suddenly, the hem of his jacket was pulled.

When he looked down, he saw the girl look up at him while pulling his clothes.

As he wondered what is this about, the girl slowly opened her pale pink lips. He could feel a faint breath leak out from these lips and she let out speech.

Wrapped by mysterious atmosphere, finally he heard the girl's voice for the first time.

"Panpakapaaan."

....

....

Hearing the incomprehensible sound, Takeru was stunned.

Certainly the tone of the girl's voice made it seem like a fanfare, hearing that Takeru felt exhaustion assault him. Despite her mature appearance, it was a very innocent voice. She mimicked a fanfare with such a voice and even clapped as a bonus.

"...what...are you doing?"

Takeru came up with a question.

While he remained stunned, the girl continued as if nothing happened.

"——Congratulations. Kusanagi Takeru-san, you have been chosen as the second contractor. To commence the contract, please answer the questions."

The girl said that without intonation and with a mechanical tone of voice. The wording was similar to the scam sites advertisement that was going rampant on the net.

"...eh? Eh?"

"Question one. Do you have an intention of becoming an inquisitor?"

"Yes............heck, you, w-what happened? What are you saying?"

"Question two. Do you have an intention of exterminating witches?"

"............"

As expected, his head started to hurt. Takeru put a hand on his forehead.

Without a doubt, she's gone insane out of fear. It was no wonder, even though she was this small she saw Corpse Devourers attack people. It must have been terrifying and hard for her. As he thought so, tears appeared in his eyes.

He needs to escort this child to a safe place somehow. Moved to tears, he looked into the girl's eyes and was going to put a hand on her head

"Question three. For the sake of your own goal, will you discard yourself?"

Takeru unconsciously stopped his hand, speechless. For some reason, this time he was unable to ignore this cryptic question that had come from her mouth.

The screams and explosions in the distance did not calm down.

Feeling the noise very distant, Takeru was unable to take off his gaze from the girl's pupils.

The azure, deep, deep pupils.

"......? A call?"

While he was in daze, suddenly a call had entered his watch-type device.

The caller was... Ikaruga

《"Kusanagi? Where are you now?"》

"Suginami, how's the school? And I'm... well a lot happened, I was chasing Ootori, but on the way——"

《"More importantly, it's getting terrible over here. Listen to this for a sec."》

Ikaruga suddenly switched the communication.

Soon after, something that seemed like the Chairman's speech had entered his ears.

《"——My dear students, right now the Inquisition is at verge of an unprecedented crisis. I think you already know, but a target to be judged that has appeared in the city is a 'hero'. You might have read of it through the educational materials, but the hero's might is far beyond our imagination——"》

Sougetsu continued with an exaggerated tone of voice.

"Is this a school-wide broadcast?"

《"Shut up and listen, important part starts here."》

《"——Many civilians and inquisitors have already become its victims. We believe the hero is heading for the academy's contraindicated area. It's a matter of time before he reaches it. While it might be shameless to say such a thing... right now, we're not strong enough. It will take some time before reinforcement from other branches arrives. Therefore... therefore I implore of you, lend us your strength. I want us to fight together. Against the detestable witch that took lives of innocent people, in order to strike them with an iron hammer... I want you to stand against it! Rank nor certification no longer matters! You are inquisitors, you are Dullahans! Let's subjugate it together... the time to hunt witches had come! Let's deliver rightful judgement to heretics!"》

As Takeru listened to the broadcast, unconsciously his expression cramped up.

"...that's crazy."

《"It's not a conscription, it's completely voluntary. I've looked around among platoons and there are many who want to participate. There are some who are already participating in the defence deployed around the school by Spriggans."》

"...is it an enemy only Dullahans can do something about?"

《"I don't know. The only documentation on the heroes is from Witch-Hunt War era. At this rate, before the reinforcements arrive the school will be breached. While it's been said in the broadcast, the enemy's aim is contraindicated area."》

——Takeru opened his eyes wide.

Contraindicated area... it was a district in the deepest part of the school that had housed the witches.

From petty criminals to heavy offenders, they receive different treatment. A prison for witches.

《"Kusanagi...what do we do?"》

"............"

《"You're the captain. Usagi is here as well. Running is fine, fighting is fine. ...at the very least I will follow your decision."》

Hearing Ikaruga's intent to leave everything to him, Takeru fell silent for a moment.

He shut his mouth tight and clenched his fist.

"About the enemy this time... I think, it's better to run away."

《"..........."》

"We, who were unable to seize a single F-rank Magical Heritage so far are unable to do anything against something like that hero. It would be best to wait for Dullahans to be dispatched and evacuate. As the captain, I can't let you die for naught. "

It might seem cowardly, but it was a very decent conclusion. Ikaruga didn't object either. It was a legitimate choice to take as a captain.

《"Even though it's like that, you intend to go right?"》

Hearing Ikaruga say that along with a sigh, Takeru nodded.

He said what he wants to do, not as a captain, but as a human called Kusanagi Takeru.

"Right now, Ootori is... returning to the school to defeat the hero. She definitely won't listen to my orders. Hatred for witches is all that exists inside her. Hatred for witches is her everything."

《"..........."》

"To me, Ootori is already a member of the 35th platoon. Just like I don't want you to die, I don't want her to die either. But... she can't be stopped with a normal method."

《"............"》

"That's why in order to stop her I..."

He stopped speaking and shut his mouth tightly.

This decision of his might be wrong. A captain taking the situation in consideration would never make such decision. Even if he went alone.

"——That's why, I think of going on a hero hunt."

Takeru said so clearly.

He understood even without thinking calmly. It was impossible.

What was the probability of him winning? 10%? 1%? 0.01%?

No, it might be zero from the get go. Even if Kusanagi style was swordsmanship for slaying things that were not human, the fact it was outdated didn't change.

That's why it was extremely reckless. It was certain he would be defeated right from the very start.

Even so, Takeru would subjugate it.

He declared that, vowing over his sword.

《"............Kusanagi, you pulled out your sword, right."》

"Uh."

《"When you were talking about hunting or whatever, most likely. I don't know why, you wanted to pull it out but couldn't ? You've snapped there, right?"》

"No, we're talking right? Certainly I pulled it out, but I'm different from my past self."

Ikaruga heaved a sigh. Takeru fell silent not knowing how to excuse himself.

《"Fine already. We've already started preparations. The remake of your sword is also ready. I'm not a sword smith and I specialize in guns, so don't expect too much."》

Preparations to fight are ready. Is what Ikaruga said to Takeru.

Takeru opened his eyes wide at this unexpected development.

"...Ikaruga, you..."

《"Ah, don't misunderstand, I don't care what happens to Ootori Ouka. But, I am interested in this Einherjar thing. It's not something of this age so I can't worship it, but it's a precious sample. If you're going to collect some data, I'll lend you all strength I have."》

In the end, Ikaruga was being herself. Not even a little bit of embarrassment had revealed itself in her words. She really seemed to move according to her own desires.

《"Exactly so! I am not interested in what happens to Ootori Ouka, but the honour of subjugating that legendary magical organism 'hero' is appropriate for me to take.. there is no better opportunity for my name to resound throughout the academy!"》

Usagi spoke, interrupting with a high-pitched voice.

《"...it's not convincing when you say that all pale and trembling."》

《"Whuaa?! I-I am not trembling! I might be shivering with excitement though!"》

《"For a while now, your rifle's being helluva noisy as it clatters."》

《"I-It is a lie Kusanagi! I am not scared at all! Ikaruga is just envious of my courageous self!"》

《"She's run to the restroom four times within the last 20 minutes——"》

《"Wha! Even though I told you so many times not to tell Kusanagi!"》

He could hear clattering sounds come from the device's speaker.

Takeru laughed at the two acting like usual.

"Captain's orders, listen."

Listening to his comrades voices, he muttered.

"...thanks, both of you."

They didn't listen, but he finished the call with words of thanks.

"Sorry for making you wait, by the way you——eh?! Where did she go?!"

He couldn't see the girl that was in front of him and looked around in a hurry. Although he looked for her nearby and tried to calling out to her, she was nowhere to be found.

She should have been standing here... where did she go?

"Speaking of which, that girl... why did she know my name...."

Takeru felt a chill on his back as if he met with a ghost.

AntiMagic Academy, main gate.

The ones protecting the first line of defence was a small group of Spriggans and a large number of students from test platoons. They were leaning over from the barricade and firing from their rifles to intercept the Corpse-Devouring Demons.

"Easy. With just this, we alone are enough."

"Right? I don't know about that hero, but this is a piece of cake. S-rank or whatever, it's just an outdated weapon. It's not an opponent for us who are armed with modern weapons."

The student shouldered an assault rifle and had responded agreeing with a comrade from the same platoon. They have responded to Chairman's request for help and have bravely come out in front, but Corpse Devourers were unsatisfactory. While the students have seized Magical Heritages on daily basis as part of the test platoon system, they weren't going against the threat from the Magical Heritages themselves but instead fought against darkness armed with guns.

After hearing the opponents was a genuine witch, the challenge made them quite nervous, so this ended up being anti-climatic. Corpse-Devouring Demons were no threat as compared to a man with a gun. The Corpse Devourers were more like hard to kill stray dogs. And even their resilience was nothing great when Inquisition's anti-magic bullets were used.

Hit by the bullets, Corpse Devourers turned into ash and were swept by the wind.

A student looked as a Corpse Devourer turn into ash and smiled relaxedly.

"At this rate Hero won't be a big deal either. That too is just a product of witch's magic. That makes it no opponent for u——"

The moment he said that towards the comrade beside.

In front, from further behind in the direction Corpse Devourers attacked from a dazzling light had been emitted.

The student heard a sound as if something was evaporating beside him.

When he looked that direction in daze, he could see nothing in there.

No barricades, no Spriggans, not a single comrade from his platoon.

Everything was blown far in the back and had turned into a mere mountain of rubble.

"...ha?"

His thinking stopped. The comrade he was speaking with just now, had disappeared in an instant. An empty scenery. Nothingness spread beside him.

Just, a right hand of the comrade that was still breathing a moment ago rolled on the ground like that of a mannequin's.

In front of such an abrupt massacre, the student had looked up at the sky to escape the reality.

A cloudless sky stained orange by sunset had spread in his view, feeling refreshing autumn wind on his cheek he devoted all his nerves to escaping.

But, naturally it didn't work so well.

From the toes upwards an extraordinary shivering had spread. Because irresistible dread, all he could was to stare at the attacker who had stole everything from him.

Standing at the slope in front of the school gate, in the middle of dancing ashes of Corpse Devourers was a leisurely-approaching big shadow.

The figure covered with platinum and gold looked divine, but its form looked ominous and evil. It was neither a shell nor armour, it was unknown what should it be called, but it was clad in some kind of armour-like equipment.

But that was all.

No one had imagined that the figure of a hero who had emerged through 《Hero Summoning》 would be that irregular.

An outdated weapon summoned with ancient magic.

That was how the student perceived the hero.

However, the thing walking in their direction was far from what could be call obsolete. It had an incredibly futuristic appearance.

"...hiii!!"

As it approached its steps let out a heavy metallic sound.

Raised in its hand, was a large sword——no.

It was aiming a huge gun in the student's direction.

Ouka stole a motorcycle from the Spriggan without asking anyone and after returning to school, was stunned by the devastation.

The once-beautiful AntiMagic Academy.

The clean school buildings, maintained courtyard. Multiple buildings that looked like western palaces.

All of it had disappeared without a trace.

The school buildings were partially destroyed, the courtyard had become scorched earth. Everywhere lied fallen students with heavy injuries. Clearly, there were dead among them.

Seeing that everyone had a guns in their hands, she understood that they participated in combat.

"...what happened... why... why did students participate in battle?"

She hurriedly approached the students who have fallen on the roadside and checked if they're breathing. Unable to contact the Seelies or Sougetsu, Ouka bit her lower lip.

Why wasn't the Dullahan dispatched. Why are the students participating in battle. What on earth does this plight mean.

Ouka didn't have enough information to understand the situation.

But——one thing was sure.

Far ahead of her, walked an enormous armour.

It was the reason for this devastation,

It was a product of magic,

It was certain that it was being used by a hateful witch for evil purposes.

Ouka had firmly grasped the sight of her enemy and directed the brunt of her overflowing anger at it.

Her sworn enemy, the huge armour had calmly walked through the courtyard that's been turned into an inferno. It was the first time for

Ouka to see a hero's figure. She knew it was a summoned human who had once become a legendary hero, but she didn't think it would be that inhuman and monstrous.

She didn't feel a shred of intelligence from the hero. It looked to her like a machine that only killed enemies in front of it.

"...you...want to...fight it...?"

A voice had come from the shadow, Ouka moved her line of sight there.

Hidden behind the pillar of the corridor that connected school buildings, was a trembling male student who hugged his knees. There was a number of other students hiding in the school buildings or behind the trees in the same manner.

The enemy's might must have been too great and they had completely lost the will to fight. Everyone seemed to regret sticking their heads into this without thinking it over.

Ouka ran over to one of the students as not to be noticed by the enemy.

"Tell me what's the situation. Didn't Dullahan come? Why are students participating in combat?"

"Don't fight...run away...that thing isn't something students can go against..."

"Answer me!"

She grasped the frightened, trembling student's collar and pulled him to herself.

He exhaled painfully and said.

"N-no idea... we participated because we were told we'll be Dullahans if we defeat that...!!"

"...that's insane...! The enemy's is a product of magic designated as S-class danger, isn't it? Who told you that."

"...didn't you hear... Chairman's speech...?"

Told the content of the speech from the student, Ouka started to grit her teeth.

"...to bait in the students like that..."

"If we know it was a monster like that we wouldn't even try fighting it! R-run, you can't win!"

She slapped the student who held his head and seemed to be going crazy. When the student fell silent with tears in his eyes, Ouka asked with a relatively calm tone of voice.

"You, did you see the intrinsic magic of the Magical Heritage the hero is using?"

Intrinsic magic, it's magic concealed within a Magical Heritage. Magical Heritages can only hold one type of magical power within themselves, but Magical Heritages of A-rank and higher danger classification and higher can activate intrinsic operative procedures embedded into them without relying on the owner's magical power.

The reason the Magical Heritage that could be used by people other than witches was classified so dangerous, was because of this intrinsic magic existence.

"I don't know, but from the very start it had a barrier that repelled everything, not letting us even scratch it.."

"...a magical barrier, huh."

Magical barrier. Certainly, for a magical barrier to be able to repel Inquisition's anti-magic bullets, it must have been very powerful. Most likely, to expand such a barrier one would require an enormous amount of magical power a modern witch would be unable to generate. If that had been achieved, then it was doubtlessly created by a Magical Heritage.

However, the school's students aside, would it be able to annihilate that many forces by using just a barrier?

Moreover, the shape of Magical Heritage it was using was that of a gun.

It's basic body was used for attacking, would it be granted an operative procedure for a defensive barrier?

Ouka felt there was something more about it.

"Enemy is a hero. It wouldn't be strange if it used multiple Magical Heritages. Did something else change about it? With this many people killed off, there should be something else, right."

As she questioned him, the student's face turned pale all at once.

He saw something. Ouka realized that instinctively.

"...we couldn't beat it anyhow, no matter how much we fired at it we could do nothing. That's why we tried to temporarily withdraw, a-and then..."

"............"

"Suddenly, a magic circle appeared beneath his feet...and... momentarily, the inquisitors in the front line were blasted away. In an instant... they turned into pieces of meat."

"What did you see at that moment. Tell me, if we know the intrinsic magic, it'll be a clue to defeating the hero."

Holding his head in his arms, looking at the ground with bloodshot eyes, the student said.

"Knights... eleven of them... I saw them just for a moment inside blinding light. That guy multiplied and attacked...!"

After saying that much, he stopped speaking and started to cry.

Ouka's face had suddenly displayed dread. A magical barrier and summoning eleven knights.

"...the hero is Arthur Pendragon... and the Magical Heritage is Excalibur...?!"

At the same time as she guessed that, is it possible? She wondered.

The historical Excalibur had originally a shape of a sword. However, what that hero had possessed didn't look like a sword, but a gun. It's shape was similar to a railgun, which wasn't produced yet even in modern times.

Railgun... impossible.

There was no precedent for magical power dwelling inside modern weapons like a railgun. The lost type Magical Heritages in shape of a gun were relatively few at most, only firearms manufactured and used during the war had existed. Although irregular types existed, they hardly were able to exert such destructive power.

And above all——

Excalibur should have been destroyed by Inquisition over a hundred years ago.

Something that no longer existed should not be here.

However, no other Magical Heritage in existence possessed intrinsic magic that could summon eleven knights.

What has been traded during the "Trackless Psalms" were fragments of a Magical Heritage.

If they were fragments of Excalibur, that possibility couldn't be ruled out. Restoration of a destroyed Magical Heritage was said to be impossible at the present... however.

——If 《Valhalla》 was involved, the possibility is no longer zero.

"............"

Ouka shut her mouth tightly to hide the slight fear she felt and closed her eyes resolved, she borrowed a small assault rifle and a magazine which lied next to the student.

After confirming the amount of ammunition, she pulled the cocking handle.

If that gun is really Excalibur and the documentation isn't wrong, I can understand the barrier existing. Excalibur is not just the sword itself, it should have been a complete Magical Heritage along with its sheath. The reason King Arthur had boasted of his invincibility was thanks to the sheath rather than the sword itself. So, the sword for attack and for defence... the sheath.

She raised the gun and faced forward.

Well then, first sheath... unless I destroy the holster...

Ouka couldn't let that monster go unchecked like that. The hatred inside of her didn't allow her to.

She raised her waist, intending to chase after the hero.

"Hey, aren't you going to run?!!"

"I'll buy some time... you guys treat the wounded."

The student probably wouldn't forget the expression he saw on Ouka back then for his entire life.

With an unfounded guess and poor equipment she went against an opponent even entire battalion would be unlikely to win.

Despite going against a monster of an enemy, Ouka was undaunted.

On the contrary, it seemed like she was laughing.

Ouka hid in the shadows and just peeking out, she had checked up on the hero's waist.

There, certainly was something like a holster for the gun.

"...........can only bet on it, huh."

She raised her gun and braced her spirit for battle. Then she pressed the gun to her forehead and closed her eyes, as if praying.

And the moment enemy's legs stopped, Ouka had jumped out of shadow with a gun in her hands.

Firmly locked on the target spot, she approached firing bursts of three.

Just as the students said, the bullets were stopped by invisible barrier before reaching Hero's body. Ouka concentrated on aiming at a single point in the barrier forcing a heavy load on it.

The hero has already turned in her direction. His height was nearly three metres. Holding Excalibur in one hand, he pulled half of his body backwards and aimed the muzzle at Ouka.

——Thirst for blood. Ouka instantly jumped to the side.

With an impact powerful enough to form a huge crater in the ground——a mass of magic power passed right beside her.

"——!!"

She was struck with terror. If she remained in the same position she was in before, she would have become a mere piece of meat. But that wasn't the reason for her fear. It was the fact that the shockwave was not Excalibur's intrinsic performance nor magic.

The strike seemed like a shell. It wasn't a bullet made from magic, but a huge lump of magical power itself. It matched with how original Excalibur had worked. In the olden days King Arthur had used Excalibur's magical power to release extended slashes from his sword and boasted of having no equal. Even when it was used by a witch before it was destroyed, data of similar usage were left in the records.

And that, has now changed its shape to a cannon, making it perfect for firing from range.

"I can't fight against such a guy for long...!"

In front of such outrageous destructive power, she displayed her fear for just an instant.

That chance was not missed by the equalled hero.

When she had looked away from him.

The moment Ouka had landed on the ground after jumping to the side, she saw the hero in front of her, swinging the Excalibur sideways.

Ouka forgot that his Magical Heritage could be used not only as a gun, but was also made in a shape that allowed it to be used as a sword as well. Before the blade had hit the ground, she had once again kicked off the ground jumping away.

However,

No good too low! Like this I'll——

Impact.

She had barely avoided a direct hit, but the pulverized ground had broke into huge fragments and assaulted Ouka.

Along with the debris dancing in the air, she was flung high into the sky.

——But,

"HAAAaAaaa!!!"

Ouka was alive, immediately after the ground was broken she kicked off a large piece of debris, using her legs like a spring she had negated the impact. Her adaptation abilities and her motion nerves were exceptional. The numerous battles she had experienced so far had allowed her to survive through this situation.

As she was falling, Ouka had fired blindly. Her aim wasn't fixed anywhere, she just fired bullets downward from the sky.

Of course, all of it was blocked by the barrier.

Ouka landed on top of the barrier. She immediately reloaded and showered the barrier with bullets at zero distance.

Along with a loud sound at impact, all of the bullets were repelled. No matter how she concentrated fire on one spot, it wouldn't budge. Even with mithril coating that had anti-magic effect, it was impossible to break through this powerful wall.

"——Kuhh!!"

The hero swung up gun's barrel trying to shake off Ouka clinging to him. The moment she exhausted her ammo, Ouka performed a backflip. At the same time as she landed, she rolled on the ground further taking distance from the hero.

However, as she tried to escape, the hero grasped her leg with his burly hand.

"——Gya...hh!!"

Held by a hand as big as her head was, Ouka's leg broke like a dry leaf and bent to the side.

She endured despite feeling like screaming in pain and pulling her favourite gun, she had showered the hand grasping her leg with bullets.

If he has come in contact with her, the bullets will reach. She thought so, but to no avail.

The barrier changed it's shape upon contact with enemy and had covered hero's body with a thin layer. The bullets were completely blocked and the hero didn't receive a single scratch.

There was no way for Ouka to escape any more. Still grasping Ouka's broken leg, the hero has flung her at the school building's wall with all his strength.

Smashing into the wall with a tremendous momentum, she spat out blood.

Her body slid down to the ground like a broken doll.

Exhaling painfully, Ouka desperately focused on keeping her life.

"...I won't... die yet...!"

She had squeezed the voice out from the back of her throat.

What had forced her to move, was the vision of a witch that had taken everything from her.

The slaughterer laughing loudly with a distorted smile.

Ouka didn't forget that absolute fear.

Maintaining that vision, she had looked at the approaching hero..

"...this degree of...fear...!"

Ouka forced her aching body and tried to stand up.

"Accepting death from a threat of this level——is unforgivable!"

She breathed roughly, holding her knees with her hands. Looking at her appearance, her uniform was in tatters and her underwear was mostly visible.

Not even trying to hide that appearance of hers, Ouka stood on the broken leg.

She exhaled out, her breath tinged with scent of blood and slowly held out both her hands in front of herself.

That gesture looked as if she was trying to grasp something that wasn't there.

She muttered in a fading voice and closed her eyes..

"...if possible, I didn't want to use it."

Resolving herself, she slowly opened her mouth.

„Summis desiderantes affectibus——”

Along with the words she spoke, the world lost its sounds.

The atmospheric pressure had rapidly dropped and the oxygen in the air was depleted.

A spark was born in the air and tinnitus had covered the world.

In the space like a prelude to hell, Ouka opened her eyes.

And,

„——Malleus Maleficarum.”

At that moment, beneath Ouka's feet who shouldn't possess any magical power, appeared a magic circle.

The space screamed as if singing a requiem and then soundlessly, something like a black coffin has appeared from the magic circle beneath.

The coffin has stopped in the mid-air in front of Ouka's held out hands.

In the instant she squinted, the tombstone-like exterior cracked, scattering.

And what appeared from inside——were two handguns.

The barrel measured ten to fifteen inches. Its exterior's features had suggested it was an automatic pistol rather than a revolver. Women and children aside, it looked like it would be hard for humans to handle it, a weapon of unknown application.

They were way too large to be called a handguns, it was a completely original gun that didn't exist in either past or the modern.

On their exterior there was a distorted crest displaying a distorted wingless dragon and 《The Malleus MaleficarumⅣ ″Vlad Ⅲ″》 was carved onto them.

Ouka picked up those huge guns from the air, and crossed them in front of her body.

"I didn't intend to use you but... it's an emergency. Lend me your power, Vlad."

She spoke, as if to herself.

When she did,

《"——As always, I hurry to respond to thine call."》

A voice suddenly sounded in Ouka's head.

A thick and heavy voice of a man. Beside her, there was no other human.

Hence, it was clear that the voice had come from the handguns summoned by Ouka.

The Relic Eater, 《Vlad》.

One of the anti-magical weapons only inquisitors from "Dullahan" were allowed to use.

It was Ootori Ouka's exclusive Relic Eater.

《"For thou, indeed are provisional contractor of mine."》

Although there was no intonation, Vlad spoke with a somewhat condescending tone of voice. The existence of Magical Heritages with their own persona capable of speech has been confirmed before. All of the Relic Eater series had a personality dwelling inside of them.

Irritated with Vlad's all-important attitude, Ouka's face distorted.

"You just shut up and listen to me."

《"Ultimately, it's provisional. I hast nay intention of responding to all thy requests. Thou still haven't accept'd me yet."》

"Shut up. Who would accept a product of magic like you."

Ouka refused Vlad and raised the guns, aiming the muzzles at the hero.

Using Vlad was humiliating to her. Being unable to defeat magic without using magic herself, to Ouka it meant that she was already defeated by magic.

Even so, Ouka wanted to defeat her hateful enemy.

Losing personally was something trivial. Defeated or not, as long as she defeated the enemy, Ouka did not care about it.

It's because that's how she thought, she held Vlad.

The enemy aimed his muzzle at Ouka.

"——Vlad, fix my leg!"

《"Your will."》

Just before the magic bullet was fired, the crushed leg had been rewound to its original state as if regenerated and Ouka immediately leaped to the side.

She succeed in avoiding the magic bullet. But not only that, unlike her previous movements, she had leaped into the sky with inhuman speed and jumping ability.

《"Body enhancement is minimal. If thou wish for more, accept me."》

"I refuse!"

《"Stubborn woman. But, that's what makes you good."》

"Cut it, it's creeping me out!"

She landed from several meters of height without receiving any shock, taking distance from the hero.

《"Our foe is a hero... King Arthur and Excalibur, huh. He lacks nothing as our opponent."》

"I told you to shut up. Hurry up and release the trigger."

《"Trigger, for the first? Or the second?"》

"First, obviously.."

《"Thou intend to face a hero without 'Witch-Hunter form'?"》

"I would have to accept you, right? I refuse."

《"Such obstinacy. Your will. Tepes released. Do you have the operative procedure for enemy's barrier in your head?"》

"Of course. Who do you think I am."

《"Very well——let us start then, the witch-hunt."》

A voice that seemed like a mass of intimidation had declared in Ouka's head.

At the same time Ouka rushed out. Towards her own enemy, the hero.

"———"

The hero had also shown movement. He aimed Excalibur's muzzle and tried to fire a magic bullet.

《"A simple mass of magic is outside my speciality——avoid it."》

"Don't need you to tell me!"

Ouka jumped far into the air. The magic bullet had passed below her feet soon afterwards.

She danced high, high into the sky and the moment she started falling, she had aimed the muzzle at the hero.

Outstretching her arms, she pulled the trigger to the limit.

"——Pierce!"

Momentarily, the gunshot akin to a human scream had resounded.

An overly powerful recoil had lifted Ouka's body further into the air against the gravity.

What was fired, was a stake of light——no, magic itself engraved with an operative procedure.

A magical stake with an incantation etched into it. Sharp like a needle, it headed for the hero at speed of light.

However, the enemy's, King Arthur's absolute defence——

...*creak*...!!

A sound like that of glass breaking had rang out the very instant the stake had hit the barrier. The moment the stake had come in contact with it, the barrier had broke partially like glass opening a hole in it

The stake directly hit King Arthur's shoulder.

His large body staggered.

Each Relic Eater had a special non-standard performance and intrinsic magic.

Ouka's guns, 《Vlad》's performance allowed it to penetrate all magic that was understood.

Required for that was having the process for using magic in the user's head.

That meant even without a phantom instrument, even without ability to cast spells, as long as the instructions for the magic's usage are in the user's head 《Vlad》 was able to reverse the operative procedure and make a hole in the magic.

The stakes released by 《Vlad》 were like an eraser that wipes away the scribbles from the walls.

The number of magic she had secured at the moment were tens of thousand. Moreover, operative procedures were very difficult to understand for ordinary people, it required tremendous intelligence and memory, as well as imagination.

And Ouka had forced almost all of it into her head.

To defeat the enemy, you need to know them first. The inside of Ouka's head was filled with tens of thousands operative procedures used for magic.

——Ouka didn't shoot just once.

Still being lifted by the recoil, she started rapid fire with 《Vlad》. All the stakes have headed for King Arthur's body and hit it directly.

When the barrage ended, Ouka landed. Although her landing looked splendid, her face had distorted with pain.

《"The recoil is same as always. Even as thy arm broke thy aim hasn't shift'd in the least, how dreadful."》

"It's fine... hurry up, heal it...!"

Bearing the pain, Ouka checked up on the damage dealt to enemy.

The hero, King Arthur was still in good state.

《"Damage the foe had receiv'd is min'r. The amount of magical power is far too low, affecting the quality of stakes. If thou complete the contract this will be resolv'd though?"》

"...don't make me... repeat myself."

《"But at this rate thou shalt be defeat'd by him. The barrier is a persisting type, the Excalibur's sheath automatically repairs the damag'd portion of the barrier right aroint. It's all f'r naught unless thou destroy the sheath. 》

It was as Vlad said. Even if she pierced through the barrier, without enough magical power she wouldn't deal much damage. Far from reaching him, only defeat awaited her.

"...we'll use intrinsic magic and make an opening."

Ouka said that as if that was the last resort and clicked her tongue.

《"Oh? Thou hast finally accept me?"》

"Wrong, I'm not going to accept you. I'm telling you to *take more.*"

《"Hmm. So you'll give me blood instead of contracting. Very well... let's partake in the compensation."》

Immediately after Vlad gave his consent, a chill had assaulted Ouka's body.

"...uuu...ghh...!"

Her vision blurred, her body staggered.

Right now, a third of blood in Ouka's body was taken by 《Vlad》.

Having just enough to maintain her life, Ouka exhaled painfully.

《"It was delicious. For the reward, do as you please."》

At his voice, Ouka raised her face in irritation.

And, grasping the guns strongly in her shaking hands, she spread her legs and lowered her upper body, taking a special stance.

She aimed one gun at the sky, the other at the ground.

And——

"——《Tepes Rain》"

She spoke the magic name as she squeezed the triggers.

Unlike before, nothing had come out from the muzzles and instead huge magic circles appeared on the ground and in the sky.

Seeing 《Vlad》's intrinsic magic, the hero turned vigilant.

He took a defensive stance and poised the gun like a sword for interception.

——But, such defence was useless.

That was because the attack, had come from the sky.

A rain of stakes had poured down on the hero from the magic circle in the sky.

Like meteorites, the stakes fell down and broke through the barrier. The hero tried to avoid and knock them down with Excalibur at the same time, but there was enough stakes to fill the sky.

Even so, he managed to endure through because he was a hero. King Arthur entered gaps between the stakes and repeatedly intercepted them, trying to survive through the intrinsic magic 《Tepes Rain》.

But 《Vlad》's intrinsic magic didn't end with just that much.

First was the sky——next, was the ground.

Breaking through the asphalt beneath his feet, thick stakes have protruded the ground.

His footing collapsed and the King Arthur staggered. The stakes have pierced the hero binding him and inflicted light damage.

It was far from being fatal. Although she dedicated her blood, it wasn't enough to bring about a complete intrinsic magic. In order to use intrinsic magic without a contract, an offering of hundreds of lives would be required.

Ouka's contract wasn't complete. She still hasn't accepted it, thus she couldn't use all of 《Vlad》 power.

——However, it was enough for her at the moment.

While hero was distracted by intrinsic magic, she had closed the distance between them down to one metre.

"——At this distance there'll be enough power! It will pierce without being impaired!"

She slid her handguns from above and below, protruding the muzzles forward and fired anti-magic stakes.

The stakes had penetrated the barrier——and hit the Excalibur's sheath directly.

The sheath got blown off from King Arthur's waist and rotated, dancing in the air. Although there was no damage to the sheath itself, the operative procedure countering magic that was in the stake had successfully activated. Pierced perfectly through with the stake that operative procedure etched into it, the sheath soaring through the air had gradually lost its shine and fell to the ground.

——The barrier disappeared.

I can do it! If I continue showering him with stakes——I'll win!

The confidence in her heart boiled.

She aimed the muzzles at the hero's body and squeezed the triggers with her fingertips.

There was no way she could miss at this distance. Her body somehow managed to move. There was no factor that could make her lose. The decisive attack was ready.

Ouka had no doubts about it.

About her own victory.

But, however——

《"Forgive me, the hunt was suspend'd by order of the King. "》

At the same time as she understood the voice resounding in her head, the magical power she was clad with was lost and 《Vlad》 whom she held in her hands disappeared.

She was unable to get a grasp on the situation.

Why? She couldn't even ask that question. Just, with the victory right in front of her lost, she entered a daze.

The chance she had for an instant had disappeared and thirst for blood assaulted Ouka. Unable to avoid, she was blown far away by the hero's kick.

She smashed into the ground unable to raise a scream or even a groan, had vigorously bounced a few times before finally stopping.

Feeling pain throughout her body, barely maintaining consciousness, she understood it was her defeat.

...........it's that man, huh.

Breathing faintly, she wondered why did she lose 《Vlad》's power, finding the answer.

Ouka was disqualified from being an inquisitor and had been relieved of the responsibility as a Dullahan. In other words, she was prohibited from using a Relic Eater. Still, since the restriction on all Relic Eaters was released when the emergency alarm sounded, she summoned 《Vlad》 believing he can be used.

But in the last moment, she has been forcibly deprived of the right to use it by Ootori Sougetsu's chairman authority.

And of all things, with such timing. In such a crisis situation Ootori Sougetsu had abandoned Ouka. Why did he do that, what did he gain from it. Ouka knew that trying to learn the truth was pointless. That man's intentions were not something that could be understood by ordinary people.

"............"

There was no method of fighting left to her. Her body wouldn't move. She had several broken bones and just breathing made it so painful she couldn't move.

The hero walked up to Ouka and aimed his gun's muzzle at her forehead.

Light had condensed and at any moment Excalibur's magic bullet was to be unleashed.

Yeah... it's over.

Regretting the fact she was unable to defeat her hateful enemy, magic, Ouka looked up at the red sky.

In the end I... didn't accomplish a single thing.

She has thrown away everything for the sake of the revenge, but ended up dying without fulfilling it. How pathetic. How disappointing. She thought. But, inside of her heart there was relief.

With this I'll finally be free, Ouka noticed that she was relieved.

...how sinful.

Even though she knew that, after becoming this comfortable she thought that was also fine.

She had forced herself a whole lot until now. Even though she wasn't all that strong she put on airs, remained stubborn, bearing everything while living for the sake of one goal.

That burden had weighted heavily on her heart.

That's why, she could no longer stand.

If the afterlife exists, she'll apologize to her family

I wonder... if they'll forgive me.

You did your best, she wondered if they'll praise her like that.

Ouka felt that herself who wished for that was really pathetic.

As if to end everything, she lied on her back with eyes closed.

The world's curtain's were lowered. Darkness arrived.

But the bell marking the end did not ring, instead——

——Who'll let it end like this.

Hearing a faint voice from somewhere, Ouka faintly opened her eyes.

"Kusanagi Double-Edged style——"

Reflected in her eyes, who had abandoned everything, were pieces of glass and a heroic figure.

That figure overlapping with twilight moon was in mid-air.

"That idiot..." Ouka muttered.

With a tearful voice she had muttered in her heart.

Why did you come, is what she said.

"——Mantis Slope!!"

A roar.

The right shoulder of the hero who was about to fire Excalibur was powerfully slashed by the person falling from the 5th floor of the school building, dutifully naming the technique's name. The person had rotated forward right after jumping out and delivered the blow while rotating like a wheel.

The sharp slash, weight of a person, Zanbatou sword's weight and the centrifugal force from the rotation during free-fall were added up.

As expected, even the hero had staggered backwards hit by this blow and fell over.

Faintly conscious, Ouka looked at the idiotic swordsman's back who ended up doing something absurdly outrageous.

It was a really big back. That's why, it looked incredibly dependable, enough to make her feel she can leave everything to it.

The idiot in question held a sword as if to protect Ouka, confronting the hero.

"Ouka, you okay?"

Without turning around, Takeru asked.

"...........why."

Why did you come, asked Ouka.

"Obviously, not to let you die. Rather than die, you better watch how I cut this guy up."

Turned with his back, Takeru said so forcefully. Ouka frowned painfully.

"Run...it's impossible for you."

"We won't know until I try."

"Are you retarded...a mere... sword, what can it do."

As he heard Ouka's response, Takeru's mouth drew an arc.

"...look well."

"...eh?"

"It's a promise. If I defeat this guy, let me help you out with your revenge."

He poised his sword horizontally and said that full of confidence.

And,

And——as his sworn enemy was standing up, he glared at him with a furious expression.

"Yo... it seems like one of my members has been in your care."

『"..........."』

"It's been a long time since I felt like this. I've forgotten already, but going against them is sickening."

He slowly pulled back the horizontally-poised sword to match his line of sight.

Holding the handle even more strongly, he accumulated it to the very limit.

"But you have my thanks, Mr. Hero. You reminded me of my old instincts."

Takeru's accumulated anger along with the words he said,

"Beating up my comrade... I won't let you off cheaply...!"

Adding in his real nature,

"Kusanagi Double-Edged style's initiate, Kusanagi Takeru. Present at the battlefield——"

And exploded.

"——Without mercy, I shall subjugate you!"

And so, Kusanagi Takeru's fight that had slept for a long time, had restarted.

Hearing the roar, Ouka had a feeling as if she had come back two years in time.

Yeah... that's right... I remember now...

An image from the past was revived.

The first lesson after raising to the second year of middle school.

A team deathmatch against other classmates.

The last one versus one duel.

An oddly confident swordsmanship nut.

"...so it was that guy..."

The blow Takeru had dealt earlier was an explosive greeting.

《Mantis Slope》 was a technique performed by rotating forward after jumping from a high place allowing the user to achieve destructive power of an average cannon by using one's body weight and centrifugal force. While death awaited those who miss and fail to land, it exerts a tremendous destructive force if it's a direct hit.

The opponent was a hero. Moreover, he was covered in metal armour that was either made from steel or gold. Obviously, only a small crack remained on his shoulder.

Hard, tremendously so.

Still, Takeru felt a certain response from it.

No matter how small a scratch it was, no matter how trivial the crack was.

If it was possible to scratch him——it meant that it was possible to cut him.

The hero rebuilt his posture and had already raised the gun.

He retracted the half of his body and fired from the gun. The tiles beneath him were lifted up soundly as the accumulated magical power was released.

Takeru immediately avoided by leaping away. It was easy to understand the hero's actions just by looking them. It took enough time for the gun to charge so it was easy to predict the move. he didn't need to use "Soumatou".

However, the bullet speed was odd. It was equal or even greater than that of a real railgun.

Despite the fact he was convinced that he avoided it, he was instinctively scared by the shockwave.

"Bastardd!"

Takeru sank low and shouldered the sword on his right shoulder. He kicked off the ground strongly and closed on the hero by using 《Battle Driving》. He jumped and at the same time raised his sword above his head, swinging it down at the enemy's shoulder again, using his entire's body weight

**gginnn*!!*

The exactly same place the first slash had hit. He ground his sword inside the crack.

The crack expanded noisily.

"——Good!"

There was a certain response. Once again, the hero staggered backwards.

Using the momentary chance when enemy had landed on the ground, Takeru immediately took distance from the hero.

He contacted Ikaruga through the intercom.

"Suginami, did you learn anything on about the enemy?"

《"I've seen the records left on the surveillance cameras, it's really interesting. Magic performance-wise, enemy's Magical Heritage is certainly Excalibur and the base body of it is a modern railgun. It was arranged so it could be used as a sword, but other than that it's exactly same as those currently under development of Alchemist corporation. So, its body is a railgun and has Excalibur's performance. It's really interesting so make sure to collect it for resear——"》

"I don't need that info! I need its movement patterns or weaknesses!"

《"It's the same as the prototypes so it should be unable of rapid fire. It has to cool down for a few seconds otherwise the thermal runaway will break. The electrical conductor is most likely using magical power instead of electric current to generate magnetic field. As long as there's an operative procedure, anything can have spec——"》

"So I just have to get close, right. I won't get hit by it if I'm right under him."

《"Be careful. In close combat it still retains Excalibur's original performance."》

"If it's close quarters combat——I won't lose!"

Declaring that confidently, he triggered "Soumatou" .

Not even considering the burden on his body, in slow motion he closed the distance to enemy all at once.

Even though the enemy's reaction time wasn't very fast, the hero had changed from the stance for firing into one for intercepting with a sword and slashed upwards from below.

It could be said to be expected of King Arthur, a renowned knight, his slash was very sharp.

The enemy outmatched Takeru in everything other than skill.

Takeru saw through the upwards slash and with the sword in front of himself he rammed into the enemy.

A shrill sound of swords rubbing against each other rang out.

In a direct clash, the adamantium-made zanbatou wouldn't last long. Even faster, Takeru's body would have been blown away by the impact.

Therefore, Takeru parried the Hero's without wasting strength. He placed his blade as to match the enemy's attack and directed the power behind him.

The impact of the blow itself and the magical power were released behind Takeru.

Inside the fierce wind, Takeru entered beneath the hero, turned around the sword's handle and re-gripped it in opposite hands.

Then using his legs like springs, he jumped and slammed the blade into enemy's left armpit.

The blow that used entire body, although only slightly, was able to raise the hero's body up.

"OOOOOooo!!"

Raising a roar, Takeru rammed into the staggering hero.

With a heavy, blunt sound, the hero fell on his back.

Takeru didn't miss the opportunity. After confirming the hero fell down, he leaped backwards with a strong momentum.

"Usagi!! Now!"

He shouted loudly.

Momentarily, something flashed on the roof of a distant school building.

Three loud gunshots have sounded immediately after that. As Takeru jumped backwards, something had passed right in front of him.

The heavy sound of a direct hit rang out louder than the gunfire itself and the hero's body sank into the ground.

Three consecutive shots, snipe from long distance. Moreover, all three bullets have directly hit the crack on the shoulder.

Roof of the 12th school building. Far away from where Takeru and the hero 's battle to call it distant.

There, in prone position Saionji Usagi had frowned feeling the recoil's impact of Ikaruga's special anti-materiel rifle.

Impatience and anxiety had appeared on her face. At the very last moment, Usagi's bad tendency has started to act up.

She was unable to feel relieved when the next two bullets she fired after the first one have hit the target.

What if the next shot hits Takeru?

What if the next shot misses and the enemy uses the chance to attack Takeru?

What if because of her, they'll be defeated in this battle?

Right now, inside Usagi there was outrageous anxiety and impatience.

《"Usagi, can you do it?"》

The moment Ikaruga cut in, Usagi clicked her tongue.

"What is up with this gun... I thought my body would fall apart from the recoil."

《"The bullets are just a little special. I tried to use rare orichalcum, but it was too heavy and wouldn't fly so far. So I had no choice but to mess around with the gunpowder quality and the barrel itself."》

"As expected, another outrageous devilish modification..."

Angrily, Usagi muttered into the intercom.

《"It's not like I modified it for fun. Without at least this much, you won't hurt that thing. Look at that, the power is bigger than expected thanks to orichalcum."》

Told that, Usagi peeked through the scope of an excessively heavy rifle, looking at the enemy who sank into the asphalt. The enemy's shoulder armour was crumbling and had something like a large crater in it.

Ridiculous firepower.

However, using a gun with such firepower was the what scared Usagi.

Were she to hit any ally, it wouldn't end at a leg or hand being blown off. The entire body would be blown to pieces.

When she imagined that scene, Usagi's hands trembled violently.

"......hh."

《"...........scared?"》

"No su..."

She tried to deny, but gave up. It couldn't be helped if she put airs in this situation. Scary things were scary.

The enemy wasn't terrifying. What scared Usagi when she was sniping, was possibility of mistakenly hitting an ally. It was the same during "Trackless Psalms" case. She ended up doing friendly fire because she was in a hurry to help Takeru who was in a pinch.

It wasn't something Usagi did on purpose. She wasn't screwing around. But that's no excuse. If she fails here, there'll be no one she can say excuses to.

This time was different from back then. She used powerful live ammunition, it'll be no joke if she misses.

It's just as Ouka said, Usagi thought. Who would believe in a sniper who could end up shooting them. Even she, didn't believe in herself.

Trembling intensified and the riffle let out a rattling sound.

《"I know it's scary. If I was in your position, I definitely wouldn't want to shoot."》

"............uuu."

《"Kusanagi can only fight in close combat. With him so close, accidental shooting might happen. That gun too, has a lot of factors that reduce its accuracy. So, if you miss the responsibility will be shared equally between us three."》

Because we're comrades. Even though Ikaruga didn't say that, Usagi felt she heard that.

The trembling subsided slightly.

Furthermore, the communication switched and a desperate voice came in.

《""——!! Usagi!"》

"...Kusanagi."

Despite being in combat, Takeru contacted Usagi out of concern.

Hearing sounds of swords clashing and Takeru's rough breathing, Usagi hung her head.

《"......!! What's up, Usagi."》

"Kusanagi.. are you... not scared?"

《"——Hwp!! Of what?"》

"That I... might hit you mistakenly... are you not afraid of that?"

Imagining herself hitting Takeru by accident and his figure being blown to pieces, Usagi bit her lip in fear.

However, despite her own fears, Takeru,

《"Nooooooope, not scared at all!"》

Said so clearly and with a lively voice.

With tears in her eyes, Usagi raised her face.

《"You will watch over me. You will protect me."》

"............"

《"I know your abilities. I know that you put the most effort among us, too. That's why——"》

"......!!"

《"——I can affirm, that there's no one more reliable than you."》

Takeru danced on the ground. Clenching the sword, never moving away from the enemy, he fought boldly and valiantly.

Why did he fight without regard to his own life.

That was because he believed in Saionji Usagi's sniping skills.

What reached her ears were distant sounds of swords clashing and the howling of wind.

Usagi stood up from a prone position and lifted up the rifle. The rifle's weight was 10 kg or more so it was very heavy.

But at the moment, Usagi had to protect the trust he had in her so she didn't have time to be bothered by the weight.

She connected a belt with a hook prepared in advance by Ikaruga with the belt on her waist and wound the belt around the handrail on the roof. It was so that her body isn't blown away by the recoil.

She placed the barrel on the railing and pulled the bolt to reload.

In an unreasonable posture she had looked through the scope, capturing the enemy in her reticle.

"Distance is 200 meters... the wind speed and wind direction... no, at this distance wind speed, temperature and pressure don't matter. Eh...? 200 meters...? It's 200 meters?"

A moment after showing surprise, laughter of amazement leaked from Usagi's mouth.

"What is... this... what have I been doing."

Pathetic, she laughed at herself.

Exactly so. Pathetic. Calling shooting from 200 meters "sniping" was impudent.

Such a thing couldn't really be called sniping.

A veteran inquisitor would make a hole in human's brain using an assault rifle at this distance.

In other words——

"——This is laughable, isn't this easy."

At the same time as she declared, Usagi halted her breathing and fired.

The bullet flew with a momentum as if it broke through the space and hit the abdomen of the hero who tried to stand up.

The visibility was covered with a big amount of smoke and the barrel jumped up strongly from the recoil. The belt sustaining her body made a squishy sound as it endured.

However, she was not blown off.

——*kan*!!

Usagi forced down the jumping barrel with her guts and pulling the bolt to load ammo at the same time, tearing through smoke she had slammed the barrel against the handrail.

"I am no longer a march hare...!!"

Another shot in rapid succession. Immediately after Takeru attacked, she hit the enemy where he was grazed earlier.

——*Kan*!!

"I am no longer a rabbit chased by wolves...!!"

——*Kan*!!!

Usagi's aim did not falter.

The barrel bouncing up wasn't a big problem for Saionji Usagi.

——*Kan*!!!!

"I am AntiMagic Academy 35th Test Platoon's——sniper!"

At the same as she called out, Usagi fired from the rifle. Impact and pain assaulted her every time she shot, but Usagi's aim absolutely wouldn't shape.

Simple sniping accuracy.

At that one thing, Usagi was a genius.

As long as her heart was calm, the entire world visible in the scope,

——Was Saionji Usagi's domain.

"Khh!"

After repelling a blow, Takeru's body strongly bent backwards.

Because he was unable to parry all the slashes, a fatal opening had been born.

The hero who lived through many battles didn't miss it. He instantly moved close to Takeru and slashed upwards with Excalibur.

There was zero distance between them, neither avoiding nor parrying was possible.

But Takeru didn't panic, he met the enemy with confidence.

Because,

——**whoosh*!*

As if grazing the tip of his nose, a bullet crushing everything on its path passed by.

And that bullet had hit the hero's temple without deviating from course even a little.

The hero strongly staggered to the side, his posture broke.

"Hahaha, she's amazin' after all... that girl."

He did see Usagi do shooting training in the field several times, but he was charmed tasting it in real combat.

Timing was also perfect. Regardless of the distance, there was no other human who could support comrades in close combat this perfectly.

Most likely, as far as accuracy goes she was more skilful than Ouka.

Receiving a rain of armour-piercing bullets the hero's body was severely scrapped all over. Although the armour appeared to be only on the surface, it was fairly thick. However, as they continued to attack in the same manner the crack on the shoulder widened and the armour would without a doubt collapse soon.

At this rate we'll beat him. The possibility of victory that was very slim at first had approached within their reach.

《"I shall reload! Follow up!"》

Hearing Usagi's words, Takeru tried to challenge the hero in close combat again.

That's when.

There was a change in the hero's movements. The gun that was being raised until now had been suddenly pierced into the ground.

The hero had put both of his hands on top of the stabbed-in gun, the pair of eyes carved in on his mechanical doll-like face shone with red.

【"Our destiny is glory. We shall walk the path of chivalry together. Inseparable companions of mine, knights of mine. in the name of the oath I gather thou hither——"】

An eerie chant was spoken with a distorted mechanical voice. Suddenly, a big magic circle had appeared in the hero's vicinity.

"——?!"

Takeru stopped his feet vigilant.

《"Run away! He's going to use intrinsic magic! We have no countermeasures against it, just do your best to survive!"》

Hearing Ikaruga's desperate voice, Takeru immediately moved.

Retreat. Retreat for now. That was the only thing in his head.

Takeru broke into a run and closed on Ouka who couldn't move. He immediately checked up on Ouka's state. With legs in such a state she would be unable to stand up.

"I'm fine...leave me...hurry and run away!"

Takeru picked her up without saying anything.

"Hyaa?! Wh- y-you!"

"Shut up! You'll bite your tongue!'

"I'm fine, leave me! You can escape alon——"

"——I came here to protect you! So just shut up and let yourself be protected!"

"......〜〜〜!!"

Holding Ouka in so-called princess carry, Takeru started running. With a crimson face she tried to force him to let her down, but as expected she was unable to do it in this situation. Obediently nestled in his chest, she endured through it.

Takeru couldn't afford even a blush at the moment.

In the middle of escaping, his spine was assaulted by a chill.

"...this is bad..."

He had a bad feeling. Uneasiness, foreboding, a gut feeling. Something like a wild instinct cultivated inside of Takeru had sent a signal of danger into his brain.

"Usagi, run away."

《"What happen——what's the situa——"》

Unconsciously he spoke to Usagi and put down Ouka from his arms.

"...Kusanagi?"

Ouka looked up at Takeru's face.

Takeru's face she saw was devoid of colour. It was nearly transparent, it would be appropriate to say there was a shadow of death on it. What she felt from his facial expression was just one thing, one intention - "I have to protect".

A ringing sounded, Ouka tried to call Takeru's name again——and the next moment.

【"——Knights of the Round."】

When the hero finished chanting, the shadows of those who shouldn't be there have emerged.

Eleven knights have appeared.

Sensing a crisis, Takeru raised his sword despite not seeing anything and activated "Soumatou".

A moment. Just a split second of silence.

When silence came to an end, the school building that acted as a wall for Takeru——had burst.

In the slow-motion world, Takeru witnessed it.

The school building was smashed down and scattering magical power, a knight's brilliant figure had rushed in.

The knight thrust with his sword, releasing a furious blow. Even with "Soumatou" activated, Takeru's reaction time was unable to keep up with the speed of that attack.

Speaking of what Takeru was able to do, he thrust forward with a strong momentum at expanse of the bones and muscles in his body and could only avert the enemy sword's point away from Ouka. He just managed to shift the direction of enemy's charge.

Immediately after he succeeded in shifting it, a wave of magical power and the pressure from the sword attack has struck Takeru.

The suicidal attack of the summoned knight of light had caused the collapse of the building, engulfing Takeru.

The eleven knights who have become a mass of light and burst charging into all four directions dealt enormous damage to the school. A number of school buildings turned into rubble and even Usagi on the rooftop was blown away.

Excalibur's intrinsic magic, 《Knights of the Round》.

This magic, called "pseudo-hero summoning" had 【reproduced the mightiest blows of knights of the round table】, the eleven knights of the round table who had served King Arthur.

The first thing Takeru saw after waking up was the sky, dyed with sunset.

Takeru somehow survived through the hero's strongest blow and felt a discomfort in his body. Oddly enough, his body didn't feel pain nor cold.

He moved his head to look at the girl lying behind him.

Ouka seemed safe, he confirmed she was breathing from a distance.

There was no problem with Usagi either. Although it seemed faint and distant, he could hear a tearful voice calling his name from the intercom. All platoon members seemed to be safe.

"That's...gre...at..."

Powerlessly, he smiled at himself.

Takeru already noticed. His lower body was lying on top of his head.

Even if he wanted to, he couldn't move. His upper body alone couldn't even crawl.

"Damn...as expected...it was impossible."

Thinking of it now, it was unreasonable to think he could win against magic with S-rank risk designation, against an opponent who had come from Hero Summoning. Even if he consoled himself by saying he did well, the frustration in Takeru's heart remained.

It was because originally, Takeru hated losing.

"The worst...way to die...fuck."

His breathing turned faint and his eyes were about to close. The curtains were almost pulled down. The end was around the corner.

"...dammit..."

He couldn't even spit a curse no longer.

"...I made such cool...declaration...and yet...here..."

In order to dispel the hazy view, he lowered his eyelids.

"............there...was still more...to do..."

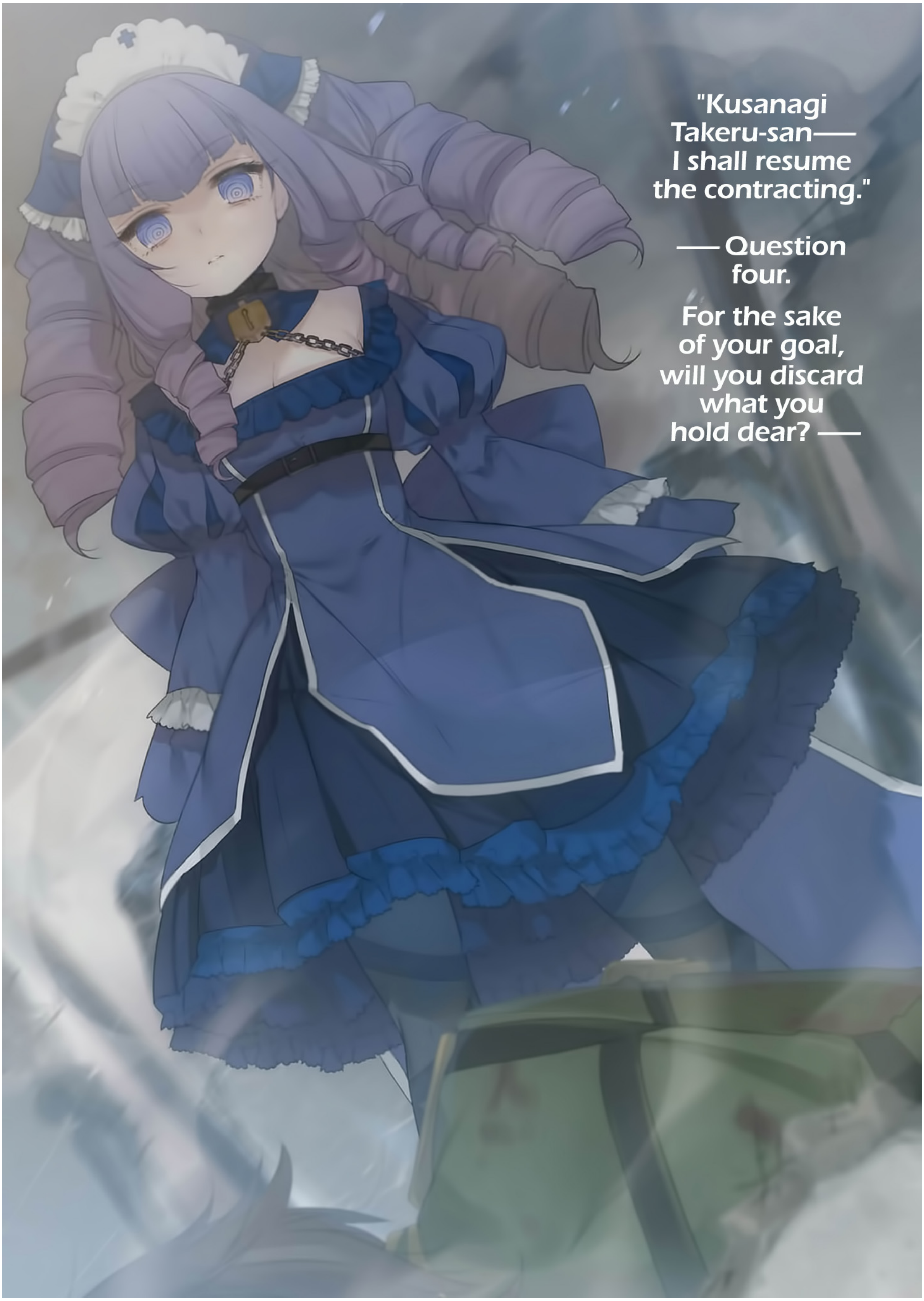
Watching the sunset sky blankly, he welcomed the end.

At that time, suddenly.

Suddenly——in his field of vision he saw an azure-coloured figure.

The figure looked down on fallen Takeru from above

With an intent, questioning gaze it looked down.



"Kusanagi Takeru-san—— I shall resume the contracting."
—— Question four.
For the sake of your goal, will you discard what you hold dear? ——

...this girl...from the shopping mall...why, in such a place...

You're in danger here.

No voice had come out as he attempted to say so, his painful breathing had coloured the air white.

At this moment, Takeru's life had certainly closed its curtains.

"Kusanagi Takeru-san——I shall resume the contracting."

These were the last words Takeru heard.

* * *

——Question two. Do you have an intention of exterminating witches?——

He heard a voice, the contracting began in the abyss.

Takeru couldn't resist the questions. He was already deprived of that freedom.

That's why he answered. He only could answer.

——I promise. I will exterminate evil witches.

——Question three. For the sake of your own goal, will you discard yourself?——

——Yeah, if it's worth it, I will discard myself.

——Question number four. For the sake of the goal, will you discard what you hold dear?——

——Don't screw around.

——The last question. Will you,

....

——For the sake of defeating the enemy, will you discard your humanity?——

....

....

...........yeah, I'll discard it.

——The contract has been completed.

——Please pull the trigger.

Just as he has been told, Takeru pulled the trigger.

Before he even realized it, he clenched the *sword's trigger.*

《"——Host "Kusanagi Takeru" verifying authorization.

——Starting operative procedure.

——Injecting magical power, starting erosion.

——Repairing damaged parts, time required for process construction — five seconds.

——Repair, no problem with compatibility of both. 100% Matching rate.

——'Witch-Hunter form' complete."》

Along with the voice lacking intonation, a bass sound of something starting up had echoed.

Takeru felt his body move in the darkness and raised his eyelids.

《"Host, please wake up————it's time for the witch-hunt."》

The monotone voice had announced that in a manner similar to an alarm clock.

Shut upp... don't need you tell me, I'm getting up now.

Feeling an outrageous discomfort, disgruntled, Takeru raised his body.

„Summis desiderantes affectibus——Malleus Maleficarum.”

Chapter 5 - Witch-Hunting in Twilight

When the hero summoned to this world, King Arthur, had confirmed the silence of the second threat, he moved his legs advancing towards the first threat, Ouka.

His purpose was opening the contraindicated area. He, who had no will other than one for obeying orders had prioritized killing Ouka, as she was the threat to fulfilling his purpose.

After he kills this girl there won't be any threats remaining. He will hurry to his destination and perform suicide bombing, using the magical power in his body to complete his objective and take out Dullahan troops along with him.

The hero intended to pierce sleeping Ouka with the point of his gun.

And just about the time he was to pierce her throat.

——That's when.

The hero perceived a new threat that appeared behind him and turning around, he fired a magic bullet from the Excalibur.

It's trajectory went straight and true towards the new threat.

A direct hit. Clearly a direct hit.

It should be.

However, the magic bullet fired by the hero didn't reach the target, despite the fact it should be a direct hit.

A flash. With a horizontal swing, a phenomenon similar to the time and space being cut has bisected the magic bullet made from concentrated magical power.

The hero has seen it.

In his sights, he captured the unidentified threat that has appeared in front of him.

There was no answer. It was different from a human. Different from a witch.

The hero was unable to obtain a clear answer concerning naming of the new threat.

A knight in azure armour.

If one was to name it forcefully, it would be very alike to himself, a hero.

That, was just a threat.

A threat to all of us who are involved in magic.

Despite the fact his sense of self should have disappeared, the hero felt fear inside of himself.

The armoured knight clad in azure particles, raised an azure longsword.

The moment the armoured knight's eyes shone eerily,

At speed even a hero couldn't keep up with his power, King Arthur was blown away by a kick.

Immediately after waking up, Takeru ran towards the hero who tried to kill Ouka.

No matter what happened, no matter what has become of him, he just rushed to help her.

The enemy's attention had turned to him, his body moved naturally to cut down the projectile.

Excalibur's magic bullet that boasted of enormous power had been easily cut down by Takeru's sword and before he realized, he had sent the hero flying with a kick.

When he came back to his senses, his brain was flooded with questions.

"...what, what happened? I'm..."

Suddenly struck by anxiety, checked on his appearance while holding the sword up.

The uniform that should have been there, his skin and body was nowhere to be seen.

In there, was his own figure covered in azure substance.

And what he clenched in both of his hands, was an azure sword.

Unconsciously, Takeru got scared of his own appearance.

《"Good morning, Host. While it's abrupt, but please fight."》

Suddenly hearing a flat voice inside of his head, Takeru was further agitated.

"...what is this...? What's happening...?"

Unable to recall anything, he put a hand on his head.

He has become worried that he had gone crazy.

《"I am sorry for confusing you. My formal name is 'The Malleus Maleficarum Type-Twilight ″Mistilteinn″'."》

"...what?"

"In short, please call me 'Mistilteinn'. Otherwise, by my nicknames, Lapis Lazuli or Lapis."

"...Lapis?"

《"I am one of the Inquisition's Relic Eater series only 'Dullahans' are allowed to use. You have been chosen as my owner."》

"............ha?"

Thinking he heard a mistakenly, he asked again.

Relic Eater. Of course he heard of them. It was a Magical Heritage only those who qualified into "Dullahan" and had great achievements were allowed to use. They exerted a tremendous power when going against anything related to magic, a specialized Magical Heritage made for eradication of the witches.

And why did a thing like that had ended up in Takeru's, a student's hands.

《"Panpakapaan. Congratulations."》

With a flat voice he heard somewhere before, Lapis voiced a fanfare and congratulated him.

Hearing this powerless voice, Takeru unconsciously embraced his head.

"What congratulations... I don't catch on this. There's no way a student would be authorized for using one. Is this a dream? It's a dream, definitely."

《"I have received permission from Ootori Sougetsu-sama. There's a a call incoming from him, connecting."》

Before he could reply, the voice in his brain fell silent and a **bssht** sounded in his ears.

《"——It's not a dream, Kusanagi-kun."》

"...Chairman? This, what's going on...? Why me..."

《"Calm yourself. I think you know already, but people other than Dullahans aren't allowed to use Relic Eaters. Actually, other than this child, all Relic Eaters are in Dullahans' possession."》

In high spirits, Sougetsu spoke of the circumstances even faster than usual.

Is that so, Takeru responded.

《"However, Relic Eaters choose their owners themselves. Among many, only this girl didn't decide on an owner. It's was very troubling. As the chairman of the inquisition as well, I want to use all forces possible for the sake of eradicating witches."》

"............"

《"In the first place, the reason I invited you to this school is because you are were most suitable candidate for Mistilteinn's contractor."》

It can't be, he thought.

However, thinking about it well, he felt it was strange for him to be able to enter a high level AntiMagic Academy. With no skill other than close combat, with horrible results on both practicals and written tests, Takeru shouldn't have been admitted in.

If there was a recommendation from Chairman behind the scenes, it would resolve the mystery.

"...why is it me? There should be someone else who's more competent, right?"

《"You see, among Relic Eaters Mistilteinn is the only one that takes form of a sword."》

Told that, Takeru looked at the thing he was holding.

Certainly, it was a sword. He read in the textbook before that all Relic Eaters were Magical Heritage in shape of a gun.

《"The required skill isn't shooting. ...it's the skill in close combat, in other words, someone like you is most suitable."》

"...and that's why, it's me?"

Takeru tightly gripped the sword in his hands, Mistilteinn.

His heart faintly throbbed with excitement.

He could feel that Sougetsu was grinning on the other side.

《"That's right. This child can be only handled by a person like you, a Relic Eater dedicated to you."》

"..........."

《"Kusanagi-san... please, I want you to use this child and defeat that hero. It's something no one but you, only you can do."》

Takeru squeezed Mistilteinn even stronger.

He felt Sougetsu's words were low. There was no man who would stay silent after being told that. When it comes to instigating people, he was a genius.

However, it wasn't time for that now. Takeru too, had a reason to defeat that hero.

《"If you realize this wish of mine, I will thank you as the representative of Inquisition. In the event of the hero's defeat, I'll grant one wish of yours."》

"..........."

《"Let's see, how about Dullahan qualification? You hoped to join Spriggan, but if you want to make money it would be more efficient to join Dullahan."》

Hearing Sougetsu's proposal, Takeru frowned.

"——There's no need."

A low, clearly hostile voice.

Takeru looked at Ouka who had collapsed on the ground and fainted.

Her body was battered. Her exhausted face. The traces of her resistance, firing the gun until the very end.

And traces of tears.

Anger had welled up from Takeru and he squeezed the sword's handle intensely.

"Sorry, I can't trust you."

Takeru said that flat out.

Tracing everything back to the source, there was a load of things he wanted to question Sougetsu about. About Ouka, about having the students participate in defence instead of dispatching Dullahans and above all, about Takeru himself being a candidate for a Relic Eater which sounded too good to be true. The amount of mysteries made him angry. In the first place, Ootori Sougetsu whom he met after entering the school was endlessly cold and ruthless person.

The matter this time was decisive.

The man who was calling him now was an existence similar to that of a trump's joker.

"I have no intention of becoming your puppet, I won't let my comrades be used for your own motives. My power serves my own purposes."

《"............"》

"You didn't even try to save Ootori... I won't forgive that."

When he said these words, Takeru felt that Sougetsu grinned joyfully on the other side.

《"Oh...? Is it okay? I'm certain your goal in coming to this school was——"》

"Shut up."

Takeru's tone turned rough. Just like when he met Sougetsu for the first time after enrolling in school.

"You——stop talking to me."

Furiously and quiet, he roared.

When he did, Sougetsu let out a muffled laughter.

《"What, when I met you earlier I thought you've rehabilitated, so that was a façade huh. Whether it's Ouka or you, so incorrigible, good grief."》

"............"

《"Fine, I don't mind. If you really are okay with that."》

Right now, Takeru couldn't care less about Dullahan qualification.

He had a lot of things that were more important than that.

《"Thank you... is all I'll say, Kusanagi-kun. I wish you luck in battle."》

The call had ended and silence had hung over.

Takeru tensed his body and raised his sword again.

《”——Enemy's restart confirmed. Host, prepare for combat."》

Just as Lapis said, the hero who was blown away, King Arthur had come back by dragging his beat-up body.

Apparently, there was a considerable amount of damage accumulated.

There were pieces broken all over his body.

《"I will briefly explain my performance."》

"What's with this body? Aren't you a sword-type Magical Heritage?"

Looking at his body covered with a tightly-fitting power suit-like armour, Takeru asked.

《"Currently, Host's body is enhanced by Relic Eater's intrinsic magic 'Witch Hunter form'. All bodily abilities other than brain's reaction speed are enhanced and it is possible for Host to use strength beyond that of an ordinary person."》

He didn't wish for it anyway. What Takeru always needed was the strengthening of the body. Human bodily abilities couldn't keep up with brain's reaction speed. In order to fully use Kusanagi Double-Edged style, one required bodily strength beyond that of a human.

Mistilteinn could be called truly optimal for Takeru.

《"Interrupting——enemy shooting from the front."》

Even without Lapis saying it, Takeru already took a stance not showing any openings.

He activated Soumatou and prepared for interception. The enemy directed Excalibur towards him and fired a magic bullet.

《"Avoiding isn't necessary. Please cut."》

In the slow-motion world, the voice resounded directly in his brain.

Takeru believed Lapis' words and cut the magic bullet through the middle.

A tremendous impact assaulted him. Feeling vibrations transferred to him from the sword, Takeru swung it away.

At the same time, the magic bullet was repelled and had landed by its master's feet.

King Arthur got hit by his own magical bullet and received damage again.

"I see...."

His body moved smoothly even with Soumatou activated. His sword could repel magic.

Takeru checked on his weapon. What else he was curious about, was physical sharpness.

"Lapis... you, how are you as a sword?"

He asked openly. In other words "How much can you withstand my moves?" is what he asked. No matter how skilful he was, he couldn't fight with a dull weapon. An accordingly sharp sword was needed.

《"Please rest assured. No matter what happens, I absolutely won't break."》

Lapis immediately answered like that.

She declared it in a strangely strong manner, Takeru was slightly taken aback.

《"I also guarantee the simple sharpness as a sword. Something on level of orichalcum might as well be tofu. When it comes to countering magic and anti-magic effect, I take pride in being first-class goods. I am clearly different from a fake like that Excalibur. While I'm inferior when it comes to the amount of magical power generated, it absolutely won't result in shortage of performance."》

"? I-I see."

《"And one more thing, I can change my shape into anything, as long as it's a sword. Thanks to that, it could be said that my versatility is unparalleled among Magical Heritage. If you wish for any change, please say so."》

Despite the fact t here was no intonation, he felt she spoke in a strangely blunt manner.

...is she angry?

In a quiet voice Takeru said "Then... a nodachi."

《"Acknowledged. Please pull the trigger. At the top of the handle, just below the guard."》

Just as he was told to, Takeru squeezed the gun's trigger attached to the handle.

Momentarily, from the long sword it had changed to a nodachi that was requested by Takeru. Seeing the sword shining in mystical azure light, he narrowed his eyes and made a happily smile.

"I see. It's even more convenient."

Convenient. He meant exactly that.

Just like Mistilteinn was able to become a sword of any type, Kusanagi style was capable of handling any sword. If he could immediately change it depending on the situation, there was no sword more convenient than this.

《"For me, you too are convenient."》

"? What do you mean."

《"An ordinary swordsman cannot handle me. Even if they are given strong bodies, they cant use it to the fullest because of slow reaction time of their brains. No matter how skilful they are, there's a limit to normal humans."》

"...I see, so you..."

Knowing my abilities, she chose me.

Takeru's mood had gotten even better.

Chosen by a sword. For someone from a swordsmanship household, there was nothing more joyful.

"Lapis."

《"Yes."》

"——Take care of me."

《"——Yes, Host."》

After briefly acknowledging each other, Takeru rushed towards the enemy.

《"Another bullet, incoming."》

Just like Lapis' support said, the hero had raised his body and immediately fired a magic bullet from the gun's muzzle.

——Boring.

"Fu!!"

Triggering Soumatou, he clashed with the magical bullet.

As if to say the same attack won't work again, Takeru deflected the bullet.

——But, the same attack not working had it applied to the other side too.

In the slow-motion world, Takeru saw it.

Despite the fact hero avoided the bullet by hair's breadth, enemy's nearly three metres large body fell apart.

For a moment, Takeru had no idea what happened.

《”Enemy purged his armour."》

At the same time Lapis reported, from the broken armour a human figure as big as that of an adult man's had jumped out.

"——Fast!!"

Takeru immediately swung his sword, releasing a slash to match the enemy's attack.

**giiiinn*...!!*

Excalibur and Mistilteinn clashed, releasing a tremendous amounts of sparks. The figure that emerged looked like a doll.

《"The insides are that of an alchemist-made golem. It's a doll with a hero's soul dwelling inside.."》

"...for a doll, this guy's quite good...!!"

《"Inside of it is King Arthur, it's natural that his strength transcends that of a human. From what it looks like, the creator was skilled as well... this golem was adapted to King Arthur's movements too well."》

"So whether a doll or not, a hero is a hero you mean...!"

The locking of their swords had reached its peak, both of them repelled each other's swords using their entire body's strength.

Immediately after, the two transcendents started a sword fight.

Heavy sound of metal rang out and sparks scattered. It was something an ordinary person's eye would be unable to follow.

Soumatou was already active. The speed at which the two fended off the blows was beyond that of a bullet.

The difference between Takeru's and King Arthur's power wasn't big. Both of them benefited from Magical Heritage's bodily performance enhancement and their skill was extraordinary.

But——

"GRAAAAAAAAaAAa!!"

——The King Arthur's sword and Kusanagi Double-Edged style's sword difference in concept was decisive.

The king's sword was for fighting people.

And Kusanagi Double-Edged style's sword, was for the sake of cutting the inhuman monsters.

As they exchanged blows that difference had become visible.

When it came to the weight of the blows——Takeru was winning.

Regardless of its own exhaustion, regardless of its own injuries, a sword disregarding its own life.

The sword for smiting the inhuman swung by Takeru who had become inhuman increased its destructive power even further.

A slash, swung down from above had burst into King Arthur's shoulder.

The blade had cut through the shoulder, slicing off the right arm.

To capitalize on the attack, Takeru tried to release a powerful thrust.

But, despite losing his right arm, King Arthur aimed Excalibur towards the ground and shot a magic bullet.

"——Guh!!"

The magical power collided with the ground and diffused, an impact assaulted Takeru's body.

Takeru took distance and tried to rebuild his posture.

The moment he distanced himself, a golden magic circle appeared beneath King Arthur's feet, magical power started to rise up and concentrate on Excalibur.

Takeru felt the chills he had experienced before and turned wary.

《"Intrinsic magic incoming."》

"Then I'll take him down before it activates!!"

《"It's futile. The enemy is well aware of his weakness during the chant. The magical power required for the activity, in other words, King Arthur's own magical power is used to expand a barrier."》

"Can't you and I break through it?"

《"Although it's possible, we won't make it before the chant completes. The reason King Arthur was the strongest, was because of the amount of magical power he and Excalibur generated as well as the sheath's performance allowing him to defeat everything with pure force. Although it's not as strong as the sheath, that barrier's magical power concentration is quite high. As we are now, it would take thirty seconds to take down the barrier and the remaining time until intrinsic magic activation is ten seconds."》

"...what should we do then?"

Takeru might have aspired to be an inquisitor, but magic was outside his speciality.

《"We'll use intrinsic magic as well. Host, please pull the trigger and don't let go of it."》

As he was told to, Takeru continued to squeeze the poised sword's trigger.

Momentarily, along with azure particles a magic circle had appeared beneath Takeru's feet.

【"——Who killed Cock Robin? With my lance, and sword I killed Cock Robin ——"】

As if to respond to the chant, the blade of the sword Takeru held had begun to shine with azure colour.

《"The blade will absorb and render powerless any magic that touches it, converting the magical power which will become our damage source. Since it's impossible to use it at range, whether it hits or not depends on the Host's ability."》

"...so I just have to cut down the magic that guy unleashes."

《"Can you do it?"》

"Whether it's magic, light or whatever, the enemy ain't a human."

Raising the sword, Takeru clad himself in his ambition

"Smiting those who are not human, the pinnacle of swordsmanship... when in possession of a sword and a body that won't break——

——Kusanagi definitely ain't going to lose!"

Takeru poised the sword high and exerted strength in his entire body.

《"I am turning the armour into magical power. Since the defensive capabilities will decrease, do your best to avoid enemy's attacks."》

"——Roger!!"

The glow of King Arthur and Takeru's magic circles reached its peak, the space itself around them screamed.

Crackling sparks scattered around and a heat haze crawled on the surface of the ground

And——

【"——Twilight Enchantment."】

【"——Knights of the Round."】

——Intrinsic magic of the two Magical Heritages has activated.

At the same time eleven knights appeared in the vicinity of his enemy, Takeru unleashed Soumatou completely.

He didn't hold back in the least. His body was no longer a human's, he could exceed the limit.

The world slowed down to the maximum, his reaction speed increased to the maximum.

More, more.

Slow down more. Speed up more.

Enough to make a moment feel like forever. Enough to track light with his eyes.

The world——was left behind.

"——OOOOOOOOOOooOOOo!!!!"

In the world that slowed down to the limit, Takeru charged at the enemy.

The eleven knights confronting him had become light and rushed in unison at Takeru.

Their speed was equal to his. In this world of the fastest, the eleven knights were equal to Takeru.

Believing Lapis' words, he cut down the eleven with all he had.

He avoided the first one's thrust and slashed him.

Dodged the second one's horizontal swing and crushed his head.

Crushed the third one's upwards slash along with his body,

Bisected the fourth knight along with his shield bash.

Protected himself from the fifth and sixth's simultaneous bow and sword's attack with a sword-drawing technique's flash,

Blocked the seventh's spear thrust from above and finished him by thrusting from below,

Parried the eighth and ninth's overlapping attacks by splendidly rotating and cut them both in half.

Showered the horseback-riding tenth knight's horse legs with slashes,

Pulverized the large-bodied eleventh knight in a sword clash.

Rushing through the light like a storm, as he showered the knights with one attack each they disappeared as if sucked into Mistilteinn.

And then——Takeru reached the final knight waiting for him, the King Arthur.

"Lapis! A huge zweihander!"

《"Acknowledged. *Mode-Zweihander*——enchantment reversal, flexible material release."》

When he pulled the trigger, Mistilteinn changed from nodachi to an about ten metres long sword of improbable size.

Wielding that sword, Takeru jumped far into the sky.

The King Arthur who confronted him had put the remaining magical power into Excalibur and aiming at leaping Takeru, he fired a magic bullet.

This was their final clash.

Both betting everything they have, the hero and the witch-hunter have released their attacks.

"Kusanagi Double-Edged style——"

In mid-air, Takeru attempted to use a secret technique he hadn't succeeded in using a single time until now.

A forbidden technique only usable in Soumatou.

Said to be impossible with a human bodily abilities, a sword of the variant.

Long time ago, said to have been used by the person who became the founder of Kusanagi, an impossible technique existing only in concept.

Unleashing Soumatou to the very limit, in the world that had nearly stopped moving, by slashing eight times at once this technique was made reality.

Right now, Takeru had confidence to pull off such a ridiculous technique..

"——Yamata no Orochi!"

Eight slashes were unleashed at the same time.

The King Arthur's magic bullet was cut down and the impossible slashes had reached his body.

Takeru's strongest eight attacks broke King Arthur's body into pieces and an enormous crater had appeared in the asphalt below.

The impact enveloped his surroundings, everything was dyed with azure.

Magic power collided with magic power, as if the morning sun appeared in the twilight sky, a dazzling light was released.

The collision of magical power with magical power released a dazzling light, as if a sun had appeared in the twilight sky.

With hazy consciousness, Ouka watched him.

Clad in azure armour, confronting the enemy head on. His appearance.

Her tears spilled. That appearance of his had become Ouka's hope.

She didn't want others help. Her revenge was unstoppable. That's why she didn't want others to be involved in it and hurt no matter what. That's why she did her best to avoid it until now. I'm lonely, it's hard, it's painful, she vowed to never say such things. She spoke things that hurt others, alienating herself.

But, the truth was.

The truth was, she was about to burst in tears, she wanted to cling to someone and ask for help.

She was weak, scared, felt as she was going numb... simply, she was lonely.

That's why,

『"I told you, because I think of us as of comrades" 』

When she was told that, she was shaken.

『"You don't have to bear with it any longer, Ootori." 』

When she was told that, her heart groaned.

『"As a human being called Kusanagi Takeru, I will walk by your side." 』

When she was told that, she was happy.

But unable to accept it, she refused, pushed him away and tried to walk in solitude once again.

However, Takeru didn't withdraw.

『"——Let me carry half of the burden." 』

There was no longer any reason to refuse, nor she had will to do so.

Just... entrust it to him.

"...Kusa....nagi."

In the middle of the azure flames,

Proudly like a knight,

Takeru approached the lonely and weak girl and reached out.

The girl stretched her hands as thin as a dry wood, and overlapped his big hands.

Takeru woke up feeling pain throughout his body.

The first thing he saw was the sky dyed by twilight and incredibly gentle, Ouka's face.

".....Oo....tori."

"You don't have to get up. Using a Relic Eater consumes a significant amount of life force. You've overworked yourself due to lack of training. Stay still."

"...I'm..."

"You don't remember? After reaching out to me, you immediately fell over."

Takeru recalled everything, like Ouka said, he didn't feel much strength in his body.

At the same time, he felt a pleasant sensation with the back of his head and something cold on his forehead.

Takeru didn't seem to notice, but his head was lying on Ouka's lap pillow and pat with her hand.

He made a faint smile facing her.

"...Ootori."

"Nn?"

"I won...Ootori...as promised, you'll let me help you out."

He spoke in feeble and gentle voice. Ouka made a wry smile.

"You're a stubborn fellow, aren't you."

Saying that, Ouka gave him a light nod.

Takeru let out a relieved sigh and closed his eyes.

"From now on... stop pushing yourself alone."

"............"

"You've got me. I'm not reliable... but you can rely on me any time."

Hearing these words, Ouka lowered her eyelids as if dozing off, in her eyes gathered tears.

"...is that really okay...can I...be forgiven for that?"

"Even if none forgive it, I will."

Seeing Takeru's encompassing smile, Ouka's dazed expression had turned faintly red. At the same time, she looked downwards anxiously.

"Can it...really be done...until now...I've been always alone..."

"............?"

"I... don't know how to relate to people."

For Ouka who had spent everything for the sake of revenge, building relations with others was an unknown territory.

Seeing her reckless manner of avoiding others, Takeru understood that too.

Ouka was more clumsy than Takeru.

He made a reassuring smile.

"It's all right... it's not only me, there are others in platoon too… it will work out"

"..........."

"In case it doesn't... I'll take care of you.."

"You will...?"

"Yeah…don't hold…back..."

After telling that to Ouka, he fell asleep.

She lowly pat Takeru's head as he slept.

"If you want to help me out... that's fine."

Her expression in that moment, had her first smile in nine years.

Epilogue

Month X, Day X 2:15 PM Audio recording number 1274

"...Onii-chan?"

"Yo, been a while. Are you healthy?"

"Yup. How about Onii-chan?"

"I'm fine. I can't help but to look forward to the day I can see you."

"Onii-chan... somehow, you seem really cheerful today."

"Is that so? Well... that's because something good happened."

"Something good?"

"Yeah. Thanks to that, I can do my best like I did before."

"...don't overwork yourself, okay?"

"It's all right. I have you, and... I have lots of comrades now."

"Today, I have a lot of things to talk about with you.."

"Things to talk about?"

"Yeah. Actually, two years ago——"

....

....

"...it'ss about time, huh. Sorry, Onii-chan has to go soon."

"Mm. Thankk you Onii-chan. It was fun."

"No need to thank me. I've come here 'cause I wanted to see you."

"I see... ehehe."

....

"...umm. Onii-chan."

"Hm?"

"Will you... come to see me again?"

....

"Isn't that obvious? I'm your Onii-chan after all.."

"............yup!!"

——End.

In accordance with rules, personnel is to perform analysis of this record and store it securely. If a problem is found through analysis, instantly incinerate it.

Audio recording number 1274.

Visitor name 【Kusanagi Takeru】.

Inmate name 【Kusanagi Kiseki】.

＊＊＊

——One month after the hero's subjugation.

"............grrrrr."

"Ootori, are you prepared?"

"Y-yeah. I'm all right, okay."

In front of the platoon's room, Ouka had placed a hand on her chest and tensed up nervously, seeing that, Takeru scratched his cheek.

A month had passed. Takeru had fallen, was picked up by Seelie troop and had been ordered to to rest for some time in the intensive care unit.

Ootori Sougetsu who visited the hospital spoke of Takeru's future.

『"――If you cancel your contract with Lapis, you'll die."』

『"..........."』

『"Oh? How unexpected, you aren't surprised."』

『"Well, it's about my body, so somehow..."』

『"Splendid. Your upper and lower body were joined together with Lapis' magical power, without magical power supply from her, your body will turn to how it was. If you don't want to die, you have to do as Inquisition says."』

『"...in order to get this result, you didn't dispatch Dullahans and made the students fight. In order to let enemy break through, you abandoned Ouka... in order have the hero kill me."』

『"...HA HA HA."』

『"Please don't try to cover it up with laughter."』

『"Think of it as of me holding your life in my hands. You are allowed to continue your life as a student, but since you have a Relic Eater you will have to participate in activities as a Dullahan. You have no right to refuse."』

Sougetsu smiled like a Cheshire cat.

Just as he said, Takeru couldn't refuse. He had no reason to refuse now that his life was in Sougetsu's hands.

But, even before hearing this, Takeru was already convinced.

The man called Ootori Sougetsu wasn't Takeru's ally.

He's an enemy... Takeru was convinced.

Then a week had passed, currently——

"Kusanagi——as I thought, can't we do it next time?!"

"Which time is it you say that? There's a limit to being timid!"

"B-but... to suddenly invite them to dinner...? I turned down such proposal many times, don't you think it'll be weird?"

"Not at all! Just ask normally 'How about we eat lunch together?' and it'll be fine."

"Grrr. This is hard, Kusanagi."

Trembling strongly, Ouka made a tearful expression.

...what it all meant was, Takeru had proposed "I think relations between members are important" on which Ouka had agreed and the situation had turned out like this.

Or rather, it was more like Takeru forced her with something like a captain's order so it couldn't be called consenting, because she was saved before, Ouka reluctantly did it.

And thus, this plight.

When it comes to involving herself with others, Ouka was this much of a virgin.

Usually she's strong-willed and dignified yet... she's no good at things like these.

He thought earlier she was just clumsy, but it was even worse.

She's been like this for a week already.

"Even if it doesn't work, it's important that you act."

"Ugh... even if you say that..."

"Come on, go in for now."

"...alone?"

"Practice above anything."

"Uuu..."

Even Takeru who wasn't familiar with communication felt like an instructor. It was the first time he felt like a boss.

This is rare, he thought deeply about things like that

"Fuu... fuu... okay."

Ouka calmed her breathing and grasped the platoon room's doorknob.

Takeru smiled wryly looking at her from behind and moved intending to wait by the window in the hallways.

That's when.

squeeze... the hem of his uniform was grabbed weakly from behind.

It can't be, his face seemed to say as he turned around.

"............as I thought...I want to go in together... the one who said will take care of me... is you."

With tears in her eyes and slightly blushing, she was holding the hem of his uniform.

Even though Takeru thought she looked cute, he sighed.

Good grief, the road ahead looks rocky.

Only weirdos gathered in the Small Fry Platoon, it seemed like it was true after all.

Afterword

If you were blow off to a fantasy world full of violence, what weapon would you choose?

Sword, magic, gun, ax, spear, mace.

There's a lot of them, but in limited circumstances the strongest one would be surely the gun.

In action games and role playing games, when you create your character, even if you can pick the gun which is the strongest weapon you would still choose other weapons.

But in reality, everyone would pick the gun.

Because they don't want to die.

Being more realistic. Thinking more about realism.

Foreigners are saying "Japanese RPG is unrealistic ,they're using swords in the world that has guns, banzaiattack, harakiri, crazy.".

Certainly, that's right. It's irrational and realistic

But, is chosing the weapon you love a sin?

Is sticking to something bad?

And more than anything, what I want to say is,

——Games and light novels are already fiction, it's fine to use a sword.

What was completed based on that idea, is this book.

Actually, about half of it.

"Things like garter belt that can hold a gun or a gun belt for hiding a gun on thighs is erotic, isn't it. A belt biting into the thighs a bit is unbearable, isn't it."

It was made from such worldly desires.

Ouch, don't throw stones at me. Don't throw E**alibur at me, I'll cry!

Greetings, nice to meet those whom I meet first time, it's been a while to those who have been with me in the previous series.

I'm Yanagimi Touki.

Was it 9 months since then? I started again unexpectedly early, but it still took a while, my apologies.

Well then, the new work "AntiMagic Academy "The 35th Test Platoon" "... how did you like it?

If it was fun, then I'll dance in joy.

This work was a new experience to me.

Things like guns, swords, school, platoon, or big-breasted lolis.

Because I'm not very knowledgeable on the guns, I thought "What to do if I make a mistake.." and wrote the book with a mixed state of mind. If I was wrong, I'd be grateful if you didn't throw stones at me or shoot me from a M60. I'll die.

Character's wise it was also my first time.

It was my first time writing a Takeru or Ouka-type boy and girl.

A Weak-kneed and pathetic yet actually strong protagonist, living carefreely yet actually having a shadow hanging over his life.

A strong character that is actually very lonely, although she looks serious the pain makes her embrace madness.

A loli with big breasts.

None of these were in my previous work, or the one before that, a serious key character.

Eh? You want to hear at least one serious thing?

——I'm dead serious.

I wanted to say here that I love lolis with big breasts, but I'll omit it as I'll be head-shoted by those who love flat chests. Though, I think the ones who have kindly read my previous work know it, I love flat chests too?

I'm intrigued by Lapis Lazuli, like, her age.
切符
?

Next, about the world in the book.

If I were to give it an image,

Dark ages in modern times.

How about that?

I might be completely wrong, but I wrote it having such an image in mind. Even though science and technology had evolved, there's magic, witches and Inquisition. A world with problems like that, which continues to change.

Of course, since a fictional war and a disaster happened, while it has a similar base, its history is quite different from the real world.

With fictional things from legends and mythology existing, it'll get quite chaotic.

Therefore, go easy on me when comparing it with history.

If you retort to me too much I'll be troubled. I'll cry.

About the other half, that is... since I think there are quite a few people who start reading from afterword, It would be better if I didn't write it out here.

No, it's not like I have nothing to write? I've got lots to write but I'm thinking for the reader's sake. Obviously——stop with the fist-sized stones. I'll cry.

Now then, after writing a strange afterword, it's the traditional acknowledgements.

First Kippu-sama who has drawn wonderful illustrations and thighs. Already at the stage of character design I've been struck agape. Taking advantage of the character features, listening to my requests yet making such perfect beyond my imagination characters... made me tremble as excitement welled up inside of me.

Next, one who helped me sharpen the edges of my rough plan, S-sama in charge. Everyone in Fujimi Shobo.

And above all, you readers who have took this book in your hands. Thank you.

Well then, I pray that I'll be able to see you in second volume.

Yanagimi Touki.

Glossary

Akashic Hazard (アカシックハザード) - It's written as "Invisible Disaster" (不可視災害) and read as "Akashic Hazard". It's a reference to theosophic Akashic Records.

Banshee (バンシー) - It's written as "Covert ops" or "Spy" (隠密) and read as "Banshee". A reference to a certain type of spirit from Irish mythology.

Calamity (カラミティ) - It's written as "Crimson Lotus Princess" or just "Crimson Princess" (紅蓮姫) and read as "Calamity".

Dullahan (デュラハン) - It's written as "Witch-Hunter" (魔女狩り) and read as "Dullahan". A reference to a legendary headless creature from Irish mythology.

Reginn (レギン) - It's written as "Smith" (鍛冶師) and read as "Reginn". A reference to a legendary smith from Norse mythology.

Seelie (シーリー) - It's written as "Doctor" (薬師) and read as "Seelie". A reference to a type of good spirits from Scottish folklore.

Spriggan (スプリガン) - It's written as "Knights" (騎士団) and read as "Spriggan". A reference to a legendary creature from English folklore.

Soumatou (そうまとう) - It's written as "Magic-Sweeping Sword" (掃魔刀) and read as "Soumatou" (そうまとう). The "Soumatou" is a reference to "Revolving Lantern" (走馬灯) and how it's sometimes associated with the phenomenon of "life flashing before your eyes" during the near-death experiences.

Valhalla (ヴァルハラ) - It's written as "Fantasy Cult" (幻想教団) and read as "Valhalla", a reference to a location in Nordic mythology.

Calamity (カラミティ) - It's written as "Crimson Princess" or "Crimson Lotus Princess" (紅蓮姫) and read as "Calamity".

Einherjar (エインヘリャル) - Its written as "Hero" (英雄) with connotation "legendary" as opposed to (勇者). It's read both as "Einherjar" and "Hero" with furigana reading appearing only in certain situations.

Summis desiderantes affectibus——Malleus Maleficarum - It's written in with Japanese (限りなき願いをもって——魔女に与える鉄槌を) and read in the Latin version. The meaning in English is "Desiring with supreme ardor——Hammer of [the] Witches". All three versions (Latin, English and Japanese) are retained exactly same as the original reference sources.

Tepes Rain (ツェペシュレイン) - It's written as "Entertainment of Impaling Prince" (串刺し公の余興) and read as "Tepes Rain". A reference to 15th Wallachia's ruler from 15th century.

Mistilteinn (ミスティルテイン) - Double reading appears only once when Lapis introduces herself. It's written as "Mistletoe" (宿り木) and read as "Mistilteinn".

Credits

Translation: krytyk

Editing: Dual-Blades, All Night, Acolyte

PDF: kpoed

Original Translation can be found here: http://krytykal.org